LIFE AS A WORK OF ART: THE BECOMING OF PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS

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ABSTRACT

KIELY FLANIGAN: Life as a Work of Art: The Becoming of Professional Management Consultants
(Under the direction of Steven K. May)

Professionalism is an organizing technology that constantly shapes and influences everyday choices about how we see ourselves as humans. This study bridges philosophical theories from Foucault, Spinoza, and Nietzsche on power, knowledge, and the self with the material, day-to-day activities of professional consultants. More specifically, Foucault's four dimensions of relational ethics (self-forming activity, modes of subjectivation, ethical substance, and telos) are applied as a reading grid for exploring the identity work of 33 former and current management consultants from elite firms worldwide. By introducing a "*both-and*" approach, this analysis challenges contemporary occupational identity politics and argues for rethinking the occupational collective as method, rather than attribute. The becoming processes for both individual consultants, as well as for the occupational collective, are thus reframed within an ontological canvas that leaves sacred the complex and contradictory art of crafting professional identities. The implications of this research suggest sacred dialogue, gifting, forgiveness, and integration are practices with the potential for sustaining loving institutions within capitalist enterprise.

Preface

"Alas! The magic of these struggles is such, that he who sees them must also take part in them!"

(Nietzsche, 1999)

I was five years old when I decided that I would be a doctor when I grew up. Although my 10^{th} grade drama teacher said she couldn't quite picture a singing doctor, I wasn't deterred by a concomitant love of the stage. It wasn't until my first year of pre-med courses as an undergraduate that I believed becoming a doctor of bodies was not in the cards for me. Much later in life I would pursue work as a doctor of ideas. But, I realize now that these are not separate pursuits, really. All work is an embodied experience. Concepts, ideas, and tasks cohere in endless combinations of activities, options, decisions, feelings, and interactions. What I never imagined as a child was a career in management consulting. It is perhaps not an inauspicious choice of careers for someone interested in ideas, as management consultants traffic in analyzing and "doctoring up" business strategies/operations. However, it is not a career young children tend to write about in kindergarten class.

Before coming to academia, the bulk of my corporate work experience was in management consulting. I started out at Accenture, working in the change management division of the New York City office. I left to pursue my Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree and then returned to consulting at Campbell Alliance, a firm specializing in the pharmaceutical and biotech industry. I found management consulting work *both* immensely pleasurable in terms of the prestige and perks (big name clients, challenging work activities, bright colleagues, preferred rental car/airline status) *and* demoralizing in its life-consuming practices. As my partner and colleague at the time had forewarned me when I started, “they will work you as hard as you let them.” Despite that valuable advice, it was only when I left the management consulting industry to start a family that I realized how profoundly the experience had impacted my sense of being in this world. I believe I only began to understand the primacy of work in my life because I stopped working for a time—truly a gift in many ways.

There is a corporate benefit to fixing professional identity images—individual, organizational, or occupational. It ensures consistent brand messaging, enables self-disciplining, and guarantees the “right” people/bodies are hired. But, the images of self are inherently distorted and dependent upon external validation and gratification. I started investing heavily in reinforcing my own professional identity as a management consultant. I became self-conscious of laughing too much at work, thanks to some constructive feedback. I saw my PDP (personal development plan) “areas for improvement” as personal flaws rather than organizational needs for particular skill sets—which I quickly attempted to remedy through company training classes. I started carrying a Coach bag and scheduling regular hair and nail salon appointments, like the other women with whom I worked. The work that feeds into fixing and maintaining a particular professional identity image is resilient. Even now, a decade after leaving the industry, the professional presentation style I learned in consulting sticks with me. A couple of my university colleagues have suggested this style is “too professional” and that I should try to be more relaxed in presentations.

I fell in love with the work of Michel Foucault through a seminar offered in my doctoral program during the spring semester of 2011. Through Foucault, I found a vocabulary to help me make sense of the challenges and dissatisfactions I felt about some of my corporate work experiences. His research on power, discourse, and subjectivity resonated with the stories I wanted to share about experiences of control, resistance, and pleasure at work. I was quick to make judgments about all the “evil” things that reduce people to capital at work—a notion that was soon complicated with the compelling reading of Nietzsche I found in Wendy Brown’s (1995) analysis of social justice and identity politics in *States of Injury*. Foucault’s work is grounded in much of Nietzsche’s writings, but Brown helped me think about the politics of identity construction in a different way. Brown moves forward with a collective politic that does not take up Nietzsche’s solution of forgiveness to the problem of *ressentiment*. But, I believe it is through this kind of acceptance that the mutually constitutive *potentia* of power/knowledge relations is made manifest—opening opportunities for the type of political, collective love advocated by Spinoza (1996) in the Nature of things and Hardt & Negri (2009) in crafting loving institutions. Indeed, the early work of Spinoza on Nature, bodies, affect, and the ethics of balancing rationality and passion grounds much of Foucauldian and Nietzschean philosophy. The eclectic, philosophical studies of my doctoral program surely have informed my ontological and epistemological approach here. My project, as I see it in this moment, is to bridge together disparate philosophies of what it means to be human as an alternative organizing mechanism for making sense of a particular, contemporary occupational context.

Although a philosophical exploration of human ontology runs the risk of being gratuitous and abstract, it is, perhaps, the materiality of the present moment prompting such existential explorations. Events continue to disrupt our taken-for-granted assumptions about how the world “should” work. In the United States, several mass shootings at public schools stunned communities around the nation. Natural disasters, such as the Haiti earthquake, Indonesia tsunami, and Hurricane Katrina, killed many people and erased local culture and infrastructure. Financial crises around the world—Spain, Greece, Ireland, the United States—continue to leave citizens concerned about their long-term security. Worldwide Occupy movements have challenged the primacy of corporate rule and prompted renewed attention to issues of morality and democracy. The global recessions around the years 2001 and 2008 resulted in many people losing jobs, homes, and, fundamentally, trust in employment relationships. The leader of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Benedict XVI, resigned amidst allegations of financial malfeasance and managerial neglect in addressing systemic child abuse cases. Even those traditionally perceived as keepers of morality, faith, and trust in the human experience have not escaped a seemingly worldwide consciousness of precarity, lack, and mistrust.

Understandably, this triggers sense-making processes as people attempt to position themselves within a particular reality—to understand the "how" and the "why" of the fundamentally unknowable. Perhaps as a result, there are many writers, from a host of disciplinary backgrounds, working on ways to forge new kinds of loving relationships within the self and with Others that transcend these everyday realities (for example, see Agamben, 2009; Badiou, 2012; Brown, 2005; Fredrickson, 2009; Freeman, 2000; Hardt & Negri, 2009; Pink, 2006; Schrag, 1997; Sloterdijk, 2013; Tolle, 2005; Zander & Zander, 2000). Research and discussions into how we come to situate our selves within the experiences of human life are seemingly timely and warranted, regardless of one's disciplinary commitments. In his critique of modernity's banality and false identifications, Sloterdijk (2011) suggests questions about human ontology are deliberately squelched through the "fuelling of rapid living, civil disinterestedness, and anorganic eroticism" (p. 27). Forgetting one's self and place of existence through the manufacturing of an identity is part of what we must overcome. Although this kind of openness is all but impossible given power/knowledge relations through which the self is constructed, it is worth striving for, as much as it is for the impossibility of radical democracy.

However, these conversations are not isolated, nor particularly special to this epoch, as philosophical and empirical exploration (academic, spiritual, lay, or otherwise) of what it means to be human seem to occupy part of how people go about their lives (in varying doses and schedules). From the time of the early Greek philosophers, we have grappled publicly with human ontology. In thinking about these ontological interests, however, "it is overlooked that as human beings we have ideals of perfection which we generally find ourselves unable to attain" (Kaufmann, 1974, p. 254). The challenge, as I see it, is to address these questions in positive, affirmative ways, rather than through judgmental blame, hopeful utopias, or discursive/political/social closure.

Therefore, as with all research programs (academic or otherwise), I come into this project with a particular standpoint and set of experiences and values shaping my conceptual interests and empirical investigation. From a more local angle within this particular socio-historical context (a cursory portrayal I've given that is sorely lacking and surely United States-centric), I am also writing this project during a period of great personal change: finishing up a critical-cultural PhD program at a university under attack by state legislators in debates about the practicality of liberal arts programs, renegotiating family life with my parenting partner and three children post-divorce, and simmering philosophical principles generated through collaborative discussions at Birkbeck College's critical theory summer school program (interactions that, surprisingly to me, *both* challenged *and* reinforced elements from my Catholic upbringing). All this would, perhaps, explain away my fascination with questions such as “who are we?” and “what should we make of our human lives?” Rather than offering this personal background as a way to dismiss my claims as subjective musings, my intention is to employ a radical self-reflexivity in the construction of this project and to recognize the gifts certain intersections offer in terms of “knowledge.” It is perhaps not coincidental that I am invested in a project of identity precisely at a moment when my own identity is in flux—a detachment from previous identifications and a forbearance on the future identity constraints posed by an as-of-yet-composed body of scholarship with particular disciplinary commitments.

Three years ago, I would not have written such personal details into a formal, public document—it would seem unprofessional and self-indulgent. Nietzsche, in particular, argued that consciousness continues to be humbled by its inherent reactiveness (Deleuze, 2006). That is, Nietzsche’s critique of Kantian enlightenment principles suggests that human consciousness is only possible through reaction to other forces. Researcher/writer positioning is an important way of making visible the often ignored (or, concealed?) reality that there is no argument or viewpoint unaffected by *both* broader social Discourses *and* situated, material experiences. This is part of the project I wish to highlight right from the beginning—truth claims are discursively and politically implicated (Foucault, 1984b). Although out of my business-socialized comfort zone, I intend to “show” my self as much as possible within the text to assist sense-making processes and analyses of my claims and arguments. But, I also challenge readers to think about how personal experience is necessarily inseparable from social Discourses, thus, perhaps, prompting the question, “what difference does it make who is speaking?" (Foucault, 1984b). As such, the personal (i.e., the localized experience/discourse) can be analyzed as a rupture, but inextricable from a taken-for-granted, politically constructed field of possibilities (Žižek, 2012).

To continue more specifically in this regard, this text reflects my interest in understanding how management consultants learn and make sense of the expectations constituting constructions of professional identity. This inquiry analyzes how a particular occupational set (management consulting) is constructed through a variety of forces and how individual people (current and former management consultants) enter, make sense of, resist, and reinforce bounded understandings of self within a particular domain (life as a management consultant). My intention is neither to idolize (e.g., management consulting is an elite occupation), nor to vilify (e.g., consultants are sweet-talking sheep counters). But, rather, I am exploring the complexities around how power, knowledge, and attendant organizing technologies articulate in provocative ways to shape processes of becoming a professional management consultant. For me, this necessitates an exploration of human ontology within a grounded framework of everyday interactions and activities. Understanding how people construct identities relies upon certain assumptions about perceived capabilities, constraints, and aspirations regarding human experience. I am attempting to excavate some of those contributing notions within the narrative experiences of professional management consultants.

But, I also would like for you to consider an alternative setup. This is a love story. Don't roll your eyes, yet, my critical scholars and management gurus. Love, from the perspective of Spinoza, is about the joy of affecting and being affected by an external cause (Spinoza, 1996). In other words, love is an antagonism (Hardt & Negri, 2009), which holds the potential for cultivating human flourishing and always requires positive, active force. Although it is possible to approach an analysis of management consulting professionalism in any number of ways, I purposefully choose to focus on the industry's capacity for strength, positivity, and expression as an influential body in today's society. The words you are about to read are the stories that singular individuals shared about their experiences with management consulting professionalism. It is a story about everyday consultants who navigate the complexities, contradictions, pleasures, and pains of affecting change in our world through particular trade-offs infused with integrity, care, courage, and empathy.

Despite being plagued by the invisibility of their work (e.g., clients usually receive the benefit and "credit" for work executed) and flattened representations (e.g., "consultants borrow your watch to tell you the time"), the consultant accounts in this study make clear that the crafting of management consulting professionalism cannot be reduced to occupational simplifications. Management consulting professionalism is a particular organizing mechanism for material and symbolic manifestations of power/knowledge intersections that involve *both* joy *and* violence. As will be discussed, management consulting professionalism is predicated on action, rather than attribute. In what ways, then, do constructions of management consulting professionalism negotiate, through individual and collective activity, the *potentia* for crafting loving institutions and relationships?

This is not a story of *how* to achieve management consulting professionalism—or, a definitive treatise on what professionalism *is*. It is, rather, an accounting, or description, of the many choices and relationships that go into navigating professionalism expectations within the management consulting industry. The implications of this narrative engender an alternative way of thinking about how we live our lives in this world, both personally and in relation to Others. This re-imagining facilitates an understanding of the great joy, life force, and violence involved in the "becoming" processes of life, as well as, the political, economic, and social influences that contribute to human existence as a loving work of art. "Life as a work of art," in a Foucauldian sense, implies a care, a technique, a craft, and an ethic (Foucault, 1997). This ethic is about the qualitative affect (please note the intentional use of *affect*, rather than *effect*) of modes of action, rather than moral judgments. It is an interiorized relationship with the self in relation to Others that negates *both* the idea of an authentic, pre-given self *and* the possibility of a perfected, self-actualized being.

Before moving any further, I would like to express my gratitude for the support of many people—family, friends, colleagues/partners (old and new)—who enabled this project in a variety of ways. Especially, thank you to the people who shared and entrusted pieces of their management consulting experience with me. My advisor, Steve May, believed in this project through various iterations from the first day I walked into his office. Thank you, Steve, for going above and beyond the call of duty to help me achieve this end result through your various contributions as mentor, teacher, and friend. I also have benefited from the brilliance and kindness of many faculty members and graduate students at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, particularly within the departments of Communication Studies and Sociology, as well as from the Kenan-Flagler Business School. In remarkable and myriad ways, Sarah Dempsey, Arne Kalleberg, Dennis Mumby, and Julia Wood inspired and guided my work. Paul Friga offered valuable insights and advice in regards to studying the management consulting industry. I particularly am indebted to my dear friend and gifted colleague, Bryan Behrenshausen—his philosophical expertise, boundless encouragement, timely reading recommendations, and "shop talk" lunches contributed to the vision and execution of this project in many ways over the past three years. Lastly, but most notably, to my amazing family—thank you for giving me generous doses of love, optimism, courage, and faith when it was needed most.

My hope is that you each will see the love and respect I feel toward you—and the ways in which you have influenced my own "life as a work of art"—within the following pages. You are a gift and I am forever grateful.

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I. Care: Resuscitating Human Ontology

"The root of all pure joy and sadness is that the world is as it is"

(Agamben, 2009)

Questions about what it means to be human occupied philosophical reflection long before the institutionalization of doctorate of philosophy programs. Yet, socio-historical contexts shape the various ways scholars approach this foundational question. The 1970s ushered in an era known colloquially as neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has been used in a variety of contested ways, often reflecting different historical contexts, but here I employ it as an umbrella term for the wide variety of D/discourses[1] dominant in the 21st century that privilege market-driven philosophy, competitive meritocracy, economic logic (including language focused on efficiency and productivity), and individualistic values. One effect is human responsibilization—a kind of moralized self-care marked by careful investment and sacrifice (Brown, 2012; Foucault, 2004). In essence, one's work of life must be self-directed, practical, and results-oriented. Humans are recast as autonomous and productive human capital—perhaps corroding the potential for early philosophical ideals, such as democracy, love, and joy. My hope is to bring back some of these early philosophical ideals, addressing what it means to be human as an imaginative and speculative alternative to extant theory and praxis within the academic discipline of organizational studies. To this end, it is intentional that I have approached this project with a

[1] I follow Alvesson & Kärreman's (2000) distinction of Discourse, with a "big D," as broader social constructions of reality and discourse, with a "little d," as situated talk and text. D/discourse recursively constitutes each other. Communication, in this sense, is not just a mediator between an autonomous subject and an external object/Other. Communication is generative and world-making.

spirit of exploration and open-endedness, rather than attempting to formalize tidy, conclusive results.

Neoliberalism includes D/discourses advocating a progressive teleology of self-realization. Being human is about a constant striving for improving oneself to realize one's full human potential. The 21st century is also characterized by corporate colonization (Deetz, 1992), in which the political and social integration of corporations into the fabric of the everyday structures human life. One of the forces working in concert with corporate colonization and neoliberalism is the professionalism episteme (Adams, 2012). The professionalism episteme is grounded in the Foucauldian notion of broad assemblages of D/discourses structuring what is knowable and sayable during a particular epoch. In sum, it defines the very conditions of possibility for life as we think we know it as an organizing technology of power/knowledge relations (discussed in further detail in Chapter Three). Through the mobilization of discourses, practices, and subjectivities, the professionalism episteme constitutes particular boundaries, which often go unchallenged given the pervasive and ambiguous nature of professionalism. One effect of the professionalism episteme is a demand for constructions of self—packaged and marketed as a commodity in an increasingly precarious labor market that benefits corporations, rather than the people who constitute them. The intersections of neoliberalism, corporate colonization, and the professionalism episteme point to some of the complex social, political, and discursive phenomena shaping what it means to be human in our world today.

How do we negotiate the pervasive and dominant D/discourses of professionalism in understanding ourselves as humans? Before this question can be explored, we arrive once again to the fundamental philosophical question of "who?" What kind of human is doing this construction? Is it a free, autonomous, rational person? Or, a subject constrained by various

D/discourses shaping the person's choices, actions, relationships, and language for sense-making? I begin this research with the assumption that human ontology is a mode of existence characterized by becoming (an active method), rather than being (a reactive positioning/identification) (Bardon & Josserand, 2011; Foucault, 1997; Nietzsche, 1969). This marks a shift in organizational studies on identity from focusing on the *effects* of static, embodied, or achieved identity attributes to the *affects* of the constant activity of identity work which, I will argue, is productively theorized within a "life as a work of art" framework. Both streams are important to understanding the construction of professional identities, but for the purposes of this project, I focus on the joy and love innate to an ethic rooted in the ontological presupposition that there is no distinction between ideas, actions, and reality (Spinoza, 1996).

Becoming involves a persistence to thrive within the body's potential to affect and be affected (Spinoza, 1996). Enhancing one's own power (not a sovereign tool to wield, but a capacity and strategic relationship) is ethical—to do otherwise is to fight one's own nature and strategic position within broader power/knowledge relations (Nietzsche, 1969; Spinoza, 1996). Human ontology is not an essentialized state—notwithstanding the indeterminate breath of life animating existence (Sloterdijk, 2011)—from which one can discover one's true self or emancipate that true self from that which hinders it. "Being" human is about a continual process of becoming, continually engaged in negotiating knowledge claims that are constructed and deconstructed through a variety of D/discourses, strategic relations, and self-reflection. We are *both* agential *and* constrained from this perspective.

In thinking about the forces animating life experience, Nietzsche distinguishes between active and reactive forces. Deleuze (2006) provides a helpful summary of the differences:

> Reactive force is: 1) utilitarian force of adaptation and partial limitation; 2) force which separates active force from what it can do, which denies active force (triumph of the

> weak or the slaves); 3) force separated from what it can do, which denies or turns against itself (reign of the weak or of slaves). Analogously, active force is: 1) plastic, dominant and subjugating force; 2) force which goes to the limit of what it can do; 3) force which affirms its difference, which makes its difference an object of enjoyment and affirmation. (p. 61)

Passion and rationality are the currents through which these forces are activated (Spinoza, 1996). In the becoming processes of self, balancing passion and rationality constitutes "life as a work of art" (Foucault, 1985). Too much passion fills one's capacity to be affected to the point where the self cannot affect—similar to the feeling of not being able to move after eating too much. Too much rationality creates an internalized reactive force in which the self cannot be affected or inspired by Others. Affect, as I use it in this analysis, is a spark to act or to feel. Life as a work of art is an ethos of self—a technique of becoming—requiring *both* rationality *and* passion.

Rather than examining the politically and strategically constructed value or morality of an action or body, Nietzsche (and Spinoza, too) focuses on the qualitative potential of an action to affect or be affected. It is a fundamental attribution error, from a Nietzschean (1966) perspective, to consider actions in terms of a perceived utility and label them as good or evil because life is not subject to evidential proof. It is impossible to understand the kaleidoscope of intersecting planes of power/knowledge constructing the ontological self and, therefore, the affects and effects, both short-term and long-term, of any action on the world, the self, or an Other. Thus, my project approaches the becoming processes of management consulting professionalism as a practice and method (action)—a way of life—rather than an achieved identity formation (attribute). Foucault's interest in modern life as an ethos thus offers a compelling methodological framework.

Foucault (1984c) argues the notion of enlightenment should be repositioned from value-laden principles to attitudes of critique that radically contextualize rationality, passion, and human becomings. In an excerpt from *What is Enlightenment?*, Foucault outlines an uncharacteristically definitive philosophical stance:

> Here we are taking as a homogeneous domain of reference not the representations that men give of themselves, not the conditions that determine them without their knowledge, but rather what they do and the way they do it. That is, the forms of rationality that organize their ways of doing things (this might be called the technological aspect) and the freedom with which they act within these practical systems, reacting to what others do, modifying the rules of the game, up to a certain point (this might be called the strategic side of these practices). (p. 48)

This perhaps best describes Foucault's overall theoretical exploration of power/knowledge relations—and for our purposes, those power/knowledge relations in terms of an ethic of self.

Yet, it warrants emphasis that this "life as a work of art" ethic is not a value-laden morality in terms of judging what is "good" and what is "evil." In his work on ethics, Foucault (1985) considers three forms of morality: rules of conduct (values), conduct measured by rules of conduct (individual behaviors), and conduct of self (manner of engaging the values and behaviors). Through an exemplar analysis of early Greek art of living, Foucault situates sexual conduct as a "domain of ethical practice" (p. 250). Through rigorous regulation of timing, relational hierarchy, and virility/fertility, early Greeks developed an ethic—a relation to the self—at the intersections of "the exercise of his freedom, the forms of his power, and his access to truth" (p. 253). This delicate tripartite balance is a type of self-stylized practice and action. This mode of being ensured moderation—a balance between rationality and passion. It is such modes of conduct in the construction of professionalism, and the potential for positive, active force in consulting work that I focus on for this project.

How do we pursue a critique of ethic as a particular aesthetic mode of existence? For Nietzsche, "the problem of critique is that of the value of values, of the evaluation from which their value arises, thus the problem of their *creation*" (Deleuze, 2006, p. 1, emphasis in original).

An analytic grounded in an ethic of critique sustains "an active mode of existence" (Deleuze, p. 3), that constantly challenges taken-for-granted values and corresponding origins. For both Nietzsche and Foucault, this entails understanding the forces through which knowledge is made conscious—or, in other words, what is knowable, visible, and articulable as mutually constitutive effects of power/knowledge relations.

These ontological presuppositions have particular implications for studying professionalism, professions, and professional identities. If humans are fundamentally "becoming" rather than "being," then conceptualizations of phenomena must account for human activity, choice, and other ways of caring for the self. A care of the self is the "exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being" (Foucault, 1997, p. 282). This mode of being is always already a constant becoming—a generative acceptance of our human "singularity" (Agamben, 2009), in the sense of both belonging, but without the politics of identity. From this perspective, professionalism is not an achievement (e.g., of an individual, organizational, or occupational professionalization project) or a closure (e.g., defined occupational identity).

Furthermore, professionalism is not an ideological masking of a non-professional self that is free and unencumbered by discourses of professionalism. Research on professions must account for the various professionalism discourses humans are confronted with (and seek out!) and how they make sense of them, contest them, adopt them, subvert them, and so forth. It must also account for the artistic complexity of balancing *both* rationality *and* passion in the constructions of professional identities—a key dynamic found in the interviews conducted with management consultants for this project. As such, I move forward with the perspective that professionalism holds neither a positive nor negative valence, but is imbricated as an organizing toolkit for the complex intersections of power/knowledge.

Methodological Approach

In examining management consulting professionalism, I bring together theoretical principles from Foucault, Nietzsche, and Spinoza. Yet, I rely primarily on the work of Foucault as a methodological toolkit for excavating the discursive formation of self within power/knowledge interplays. A Foucauldian conceptual analysis critiques taken-for-granted assumptions about how the world operates and how humans interact within strategic and contingent discursive frames. In this kind of analysis, knowledge is not the discovery of the essence of things, but the investigation of the invention of truth—an interpreted construction of a construction (Bardon & Josserand, 2011; Foucault, 1984a, 1984b). As such, I am studying the conditions of possibility of actions within a particular historical and situational context, rather than attempting to define a monolithic professional management consultant. Foucault's work is well-suited as a methodological guide, as his body of work is about how humans develop knowledge about themselves.

Foucault's work can be divided roughly into three overlapping projects—archaeology (discourse), genealogy (power/knowledge), and ethics (subjectivity). Bardon & Josserand (2011) offer a compelling blend of Foucault and Nietzsche's works. The authors suggest organizational analyses could benefit from a genealogy of morals, which holds the promise of reevaluating organizing values and practices within a grid of power/knowledge relations. Modes of self-becoming within a field of power/knowledge entail *both* individual action *and* social practice grounded in particular historical contexts (Bardon & Josserland, 2011). Genealogy is "a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history" (Foucault, 1980, p. 117). I would characterize this project as an "anti-science," then, with attention to the discourses, techniques, articulations of power/knowledge, and moral care suffused in becoming processes of self within a particular socio-historical domain of management consulting professionalism.

Studying the Artistry of Becoming Professional Management Consultants

My overarching research question is: how do management consultants learn, negotiate, and sustain discourses of professionalism within activities, knowledge, and relationships of self-becoming? To gain an understanding of these issues, I conducted interviews with 33 former and current management consultants with experience working for large, established consulting firms. My participants included 14 former consultants and 19 current consultants (13 female, 20 male). There are 17 firms represented by the participants' consulting experiences, with several consultants having experience at multiple firms. I also spoke with four people with experience as independent management consultants and several former consultants now in industry positions who often hire and manage consultant projects from the client side of the equation. The firms include[2]:

[2] One participant asked that her/his employing firm not be mentioned in the list of consulting firms.

- Accenture
- Aon
- AT Kearney
- Bain
- Booz, Allen, Hamilton
- Boston Consulting Group
- Campbell Alliance
- CapGemini
- Censeo
- Deloitte
- Ernst & Young
- Hitachi Consulting
- IBM
- KPMG
- McKinsey
- Perficient

I chose to focus on traditional, top-ranked business consulting firms because of the impact these elite firms have on the occupation more broadly, as well as industry dynamics. Elite consulting firms influenced the development and fragmentation of the consulting industry through a variety of competitive practices and hold significant sway over global industry operations (McKenna, 2006). While offering interesting insights into how these firms develop consultant, firm, and occupational identities, this selective participant sampling does limit possibilities for framing the nuanced inter-firm dynamics of a highly differentiated industry (to be explained in further detail in Chapter Two.)

Beginning with my own social networks, I sent messages about my research project to several former and current consultants requesting their participation. At the end of each interview I conducted, I asked the participant if s/he was willing to connect me with one or two additional people who might be interested in participating—creating a snowball sampling. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and via telephone, depending upon geographical location and participant preference. Our conversations lasted between 20 minutes and 2 hours, with most of them running about 40 minutes. I took notes during each of the interviews.

The questions posed to interview participants were open-ended to allow for a range of voluntary responses and explored how participants learn, define, negotiate, and maintain professionalism (see **Appendix A: Interview Guide**). The interview questions did not ask for information that would reasonably place the participants at risk for legal actions, financial damage, or employment termination. With the exception of four cases, interviews were audio-recorded.

A methodology rooted in Foucauldian/Nietzschean principles does not lend itself to coding data or seeking deeper meaning—or, any scientific classification that would suggest a final truth or knowledge. Instead, my analysis centers on the conditions of possibility that influence how individuals engage in a project of professionalism. This kind of analysis bridges the epistemic effects of D/discourse, the disciplinary technologies of power/resistance, and the pleasures/knowledge of caring for one's self. Following Bardon & Josserland's (2011) call for organizational analyses on "life as a work of art," I use Foucault's (1997) four dimensions of relational ethics—"how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions" (Foucault, p. 263)—as a "reading grid" (Bardon & Josserland, p. 510) for interpreting the becoming activities of management consultant professionalism.

Using interview transcriptions and hand-written/typed notes, I related participant responses to the four dimensions. The following elements contribute to a genealogy of the self—an excavation of the problematizations, technologies, authorities, teleologies, and strategies shaping how we "become" (Rose 1996). Foucault (1985, 1997) delineates the following actions in crafting one's self, based upon his genealogical analysis of early Greek sexual ethics:

1. <u>Ethical substance (e.g., aphrodisia/sexual behavior)</u>: Ethical substance concerns "the way in which the individual has to constitute this or that part of himself as the prime material of his moral conduct" (Foucault, 1985, p. 26).

   Guiding questions for professionalism analysis: What parts of the self are influenced by professionalism? How does it feel to act professionally? In what ways does being a professional management consultant complement and/or contradict other identities held?

2. Mode of subjectivation (e.g., chrēsis/use of pleasures): A mode of subjection includes "the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice" (Foucault, 1985, p. 27).

   Guiding questions for professionalism analysis: How do consultants learn expectations for professionalism? In what ways are they asked to be professional?

3. Self-forming activity (e.g., enkrateia/mastery of self): Self-forming activities extend work performed "on oneself, not only in order to bring one's conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior" (Foucault, 1985, p. 27).

   Guiding questions for professionalism analysis: What do consultants do to become a professional management consultant? What training programs are available? What struggles do they face in becoming professional/maintaining professionalism?

4. Telos (e.g., sōphrosynē/fulfillment of freedom and truth): "A moral action tends toward its own accomplishment; but it also aims beyond the latter, to the establishing of a moral conduct that commits an individual, not only to other actions always in conformity with values and rules, but to a certain mode of being, a mode of being characteristic of the ethical subject" (Foucault, 1985, p. 28).

   Guiding questions for professionalism analysis: What kind of person do consultants aspire to be when they act professionally? What are the rewards for acting professionally? What is gained from achieving professionalism and expertise as a consultant?

According to Foucault, these actions are inextricable from each other. As the combination facilitates a history of the construction of self, through "setting up and developing relationships with the self, for self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination, for the decipherment of the self by oneself, for the transformations that one seeks to accomplish with oneself as subject" (Foucault, 1985, p. 29)—Foucault calls this set an "ethics" or "ascetics" (p. 29). These modes of becoming are neither good nor evil, despite how readers may interpret consultant activities of becoming professional. The craftsmanship of an ethic, or mode of becoming, focuses on doing for its own sake, rather than for a particular means, ends, or value. This is not to suggest a moral relativism, but simply to activate a theoretical tradition that focuses on the potential of actions. Some activities and interactions in the crafting of self enhance life force, while others reduce it—but, in either case, it is impossible to know all of the affects or all of the effects (in the present or the future), thus rendering any judgment partial, at best.

A first round of preliminary insights were gathered in January 2013 from an existing base of 23 interviews. These initial reflections (see **Appendix B: Preliminary Insights**) were itemized and sent to the participants for review. I explained that no reply was necessary, but that the document was intended to keep them informed of my progress and offer a roadmap for where my project was heading, should they have the inclination/time to provide feedback. Of the 10 responses I received back to the preliminary insights document, several consultants remarked that the blend of philosophical and business language I used in the summary was "interesting." Only one current consultant suggested a revision. She recommended taking out the claim "you can pick out a former consultant anywhere," unless I had a "how" to supplement the statement. By seeking feedback on my interpretations, my hope was to continue a collaborative partnership with participants that would extend beyond the research process.

The decision to not include descriptive identifying categories with interview quotes within this text is intentional. Rather than describing identity categories that risk ascribing unnecessary attributes or assumptions, I use generic markers of "current consultant" and "former consultant" for interview quotes. I went back and forth about how to write about my participants' experiences. By nature of the beast, the information showcased in this text is extricated and presented in a way to build a story and promote a particular argument—thus inflicting a kind of violence to the original contexts and flows of our conversations/relationships. One approach is to provide rich descriptions of the participants as a way to contextualize their comments. But, then this could create a false sense of "knowing" the consultants. As I am trying to move away from the perceived value of fixing identities, this was not an appropriate methodological approach for my theoretical commitments. As such, I move forward with the position that it is less important for readers to visualize who these bodies *are*—in terms of static, politically-charged, and potentially misleading demographic identifiers—and, more important to make sense of what they are *doing* in this present moment.

As a final step in my research methodology, I went back through the transcriptions and my notes a second time to look for additional descriptive material regarding consultant becoming activities, as well as to pull out evocative quotes to supplement claims made in the text.

Guiding Principles

Questions about how management consultants engage in a project of self to construct professional identities contribute to broader understandings of what it means to be human. While management studies tends to reflect an underlying assumption that humans live to work, I am interested in how we make choices every day in the negotiation of various D/discourses and the impact of those choices in how we live our life. As such, work is one context for understanding that bigger question. The becoming activities of professional management consultants are power/knowledge effects through which to explore broader ontological principles.

This project is not about what humans can achieve as professionals (or, the differential barriers to that achievement), but more about how professionalism as an organizing technology constantly shapes and influences everyday choices about how we see ourselves as humans. This is not to suggest professionalism is a completely deterministic force, though. As Schrag (1997) argues, "the situating of speakers, authors, and actors within an intentionality of embodiment functioning at the interstices of activity and passivity, doing and suffering, vitalizes and enriches the self as a source of empowerment" (p. 62). Some activities and interactions enhance our life force, while others reduce it. Those ongoing struggles are what I'm interested in—for how they *both* enable *and* constrain people in constructing their lives as a "work of art."

Exploring "becomings" within the context of management consulting professionalism makes sense given my own experience and identification with this occupational line of work. But, I've also chosen it as an exemplar for a larger argument I am trying to make. The most sensational accounts of this occupational work is of the "snake oil salesman" sort (O'Shea & Madigan, 1998)—or, worse, soulless robots (Berardi, 2009; Cederström & Fleming, 2012). These stereotypical representations obscure the heart and soul of living, breathing humans doing inspiring work and building loving relationships within a post-Fordist capitalist society. I realize this may not be a welcomed message for critical theorists of organizing practices, who potentially would eschew this perspective as another ideological ruse of capitalism. But, I believe organizational analyses must move beyond portraits of corporate workers as individualistic, entrepreneurial cogs in a hamster wheel of consumption and production of brand.

Life is more complicated than that. If we can identify the "ugly" side of work, then surely there must be a corresponding "beauty" that makes the "ugly" visible, comparatively speaking. If ideas and realities are inseparable (Spinoza, 1996), then messages of positivity hold the potential for enhancing life's capacity for good and strength.

Neoliberalism, globalization, and capitalism—be they as they may—are certainly worthy of critique, but organizational analyses that attempt to free people from the demoralizing effects of corporate colonization (a term coined by Deetz, 1992, to reflect the institutionalization of corporations in our everyday lives) sometimes forget to bring to life the living, breathing, and intelligent human being. Because management consultants do not "qualify" as a historically marginalized collective (or, perhaps they are most representative if viewed from the lens of corporately colonized, alienated subjects of neoliberalism), this occupation offers a nuanced understanding of work and self in contemporary corporate work. As will be discussed, consultant stories about management consulting professionalism include aspirations, pay-offs, and challenges centered around: helping, courage, fun, love, joy, relational intimacy, intellectual stimulation, excitement, fulfillment, gratitude, and inspiration. This recasts their work experiences in a different light and suggests becoming activities of professionalism warrant attention, not just for their subjectivizing effects, but also for their capacity to enable individual and collective flourishing.

My intention is to make several arguments in this regard. First, it is important to remember that the contemporary "knowledge worker" is a living, breathing, active agent in the construction of work experiences and identities. This worker is very much alive—a point that is often overlooked in theories about the ideological and alienating effects of corporate-inspired self-disciplining. Foucault positions the self as an effect of power/knowledge relations. But, even Foucault (1997) is adamant that the strategic power relations through which subjectivity is constructed are “mobile, reversible, and unstable […] with at least a certain degree of freedom on both sides” (p. 292). My application of these principles involves two aspects. On the one hand, consultants have provided first-hand accounts of the everyday work of management consulting. Rather than using the usual, ambiguous classification of “helping clients solve business challenges,” which often invokes images of nameless suits firing people at will, this research provides a window into the material and embodied work consultants perform. As organizational communication scholar Karen Ashcraft (2006) would say, this gets at the sweat involved in consulting work. It also addresses Greiner and Poulfelt’s (2005) call for research agendas that address important questions regarding “the professional development of consultants” (p. 457). On the other hand, through the material manifestations of conceptual labor and the evocative narratives consultants shared, we also can glean a loving passion within management consulting professionalism not captured in contemporary characterizations of corporate work as soulless and robotic.

Secondly, this research highlights the complexity of identity work within the intersections of power/knowledge. In order for organizational studies to move beyond dichotomous framings of people at work as either autonomous agents or controlled subjects, my methodological appropriation of Foucault and Nietzsche facilitates nuanced understandings of how work experiences can be “*both-and*” within the aesthetic work of becoming. A *both-and* perspective is not a reformulation of the Hegelian dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. In a *both-and* perspective, each body (the body can be any extension of Nature from a Spinozan perspective—the physical, symbolic, discursive, non-discursive, and collective are all expressions of a body) retains its singularity and difference. But, not difference as constructed in relation to the Other; difference as innate multiplicity.

Synthesis may or may not happen depending upon the qualitative constitution of the bodies. Some bodies enhance our constitution, while others do not—a case rendering any hope for a common notion improbable, as incompatible bodies reduce our own capacity for strength. The forces are not necessarily in opposition to each other. This is important because what is often left out of the picture is the great pleasure that connects the control and freedom aspects of work life. As Foucault (1978) argued in this regard:

> Pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement. (p. 48)

It is the very inspiration, aspiration, joy, and love in consultant work experiences that give insight into how the becoming of professional management consultants is at the same time *both* determined *and* indeterminate. Management consultant professional becoming processes are integrative, rather than dialectical. Within epistemic fields of possibility, everyday discourse, individual aspirations, and occupational resemblances, consultants *both* flow into *and* struggle at the same time with the activities that go into crafting professional selves.

Thirdly, this project argues that the work management consultants engage in to craft notions of professionalism create "life as a work of art." As will be demonstrated through the becoming processes and activities of consultants, identity work involves a creative blend of *both* rationality *and* passion. For Spinoza (1996) and Nietzsche (1999), enhancing one's own power is ethical because it is part of one's human nature. Indeed, Foucault (1980) suggests, "power is 'always already there,' that one is never 'outside' it" (p. 141). This is true for every human being, which begets an analytical emphasis on the strategic relations connecting the world around us. Therefore, cooperation in the form of democratic methods is the only way to enhance the power of self and Other and, thus, for *all*. These democratic methods require creativity, as will be discussed further in Chapter Five. As “life as a work of art” relies upon interactions with Others—a method that is predicated upon discourse—this conceptualization can be expanded to theorize the common. Building on this perspective of singular becomings, an occupational line of work understood through action, rather than attribute, opens opportunities for positive affect.

Lastly, management consulting professionalism cultivates a particular kind of aesthetic image. It would be a major oversight of this project not to address the prevalence of white, middle-aged, heterosexual men in large firms, particularly those within partnership models. The emergence of feminist, intersectional analyses point to the concomitant nature of notions of difference, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality (the identity constructions most commonly applied in organizational studies). Yet, because of the socially, discursively, and politically manufactured nature of these categories, the mutually constitutive effects of the categories are difficult to capture, period, and also prove difficult to avoid reductions of people to fixed identity markers.

The collective, theorized through identity marker differences, flattens the localized struggles, thereby segregating occupations into bodies—which may very well be sedimented manifestations in aggregate form—but, still obscure the everyday struggles of all humans at the intersections of multiple identity markers and ignore broader teleological magnetisms. I am curious about the ways in which communities strategically marshal notions of difference to facilitate competitive boundaries, but am cautious about fixing an identity politic that may overlook the ways in which all humans struggle against intersecting planes of social markings at the expense of one particular category (e.g., gender). My approach, for purposes of this study, is to highlight the ways in which individual consultants address the numerous challenges of meeting expectations of professionalism.

These principles and arguments are addressed more robustly in the upcoming pages. As a preview, I offer the following overviews of subsequent chapters:

Chapter Two moves into a deeper exploration of the management consulting industry and the everyday work of management consultants. Through a contextualization of the contemporary global business arena and the consulting industry's place within it, I make an argument about the growing influence of consulting in international operations and the politics of everyday life. A large part of the management consulting value proposition rests in embodied professionalism. Professionalism is integral to management consulting firm success.

Chapter Three bridges philosophical principles from Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Foucault as an ontological framework for making sense of consultants' becoming activities in Chapter Four. After outlining the principles guiding the "life as a work of art" ethos advocated in this project, I bring into the conversation extant research on power, knowledge, and self in contemporary organizational studies. Using examples from my management consulting interviews, I illustrate the organizing work of the professionalism episteme within the previously established field of power/knowledge relations.

Chapter Four brings to life the aesthetic work of becoming a professional management consultant. Using Foucault's four dimensions of an ethic of self as a reading grid, this chapter offers insights into how consultants work at professionalism in ways that affect their ethical substance, self-forming activities, teleologies, and various modes of subjectification. Life as a work of art is *both-and*—simultaneously determining and indeterminate, but without the possibility of achieving a particular end because life is action. Life as a work of art—even within the fixed domain of professional identity work—is never a fixed portrait, but a series of actions upon actions.

Chapter Five uses Ashcraft's (2013) glass slipper metaphor as an example of a *both-and* analytical tool. Ashcraft's illustrative metaphor captures the discriminatory effects of occupational segregation practices and offers a means for integrating diversity studies into mainstream management studies. This conceptual tool activates *both* active *and* reactive forces. The glass slipper metaphor *both* makes the case for greater attention to the debilitating effects of knowing work through the bodies of its practitioners *and* reduces occupations' potential for affect by reducing the collective body's power to the attributes of its members. This reduction leads to an increased risk of perpetuating occupational identity politics within a sphere of lack. Using socially constructed identity markers as a means to claim power—in this case, occupational exclusion—can be interpreted as a position of Nietzschean *ressentiment* that could potentially spread bad consciousness and aesthetic ideals (Brown, 1995, Nietzsche, 1969). Given the Spinozan view that all bodies are connected in Nature and have power (in the *potentia* of affect sense of the term), this conceptualization is problematic. When identity is treated as a property with particular rights and constraints, it limits the perceived potential for affecting and being affected.

Lastly, Chapter Six summarizes life as a work of art as a will to power—a continual overcoming of the self in the present moment, as situated within a playing field of power/knowledge relations. By way of a concluding discussion, I look at the potential of love as an antagonism grounded in strength and positivity for *both* crafting relations with self *and* the inevitable attraction of Others, which leads to the promise for loving institutions, as well.

II. Work: The Management Consulting Value Proposition

"Love stories are stories of form"

(Sloterdijk, 2011)

In order to set the stage for an analysis of management consulting professionalism within the context of the theoretical framework established in the previous chapter, the following sections provide background on the industry and day-to-day work of management consultants. Consultant descriptions of their own activities paint a picture of the influential ways in which management consultants impact global business operations from behind the scenes. These descriptive accounts made a significant contribution to occupational scholarship on management consulting as both former and current consultants explicate what exactly is entailed in "helping clients solve business challenges." These accounts also contribute to an understanding of the ways in which "intellectual" or "knowledge" work also involves embodied labor, thus collapsing dichotomous theoretical separations of mental and manual work in organizational studies.

Professionalism is a key part of the value proposition offered to clients in hiring management consultants. In fact, consultant accounts from this study suggest that work produced for clients is not as valuable without the professionalism with which the project results are delivered. The role of professionalism in occupational work is further discussed in conversation with extant research in sociology, management studies, organizational communication, and popular press texts. The last section of this chapter offers key considerations for conceptualizing management consulting as a common body, which will provide a conceptual foundation for theorizing the collective capabilities of occupations in Chapter Five.

Management Consulting Overview

The emergence of the modern organization in the late 19th century brought opportunities for experts to provide business operations advice. The early days of management consulting work were founded in engineering. Fredrick Taylor is often cited as the first management consultant, based upon his marketing and implementation of scientific management principles. Less well-known are the contributions to the industry of Lillian Gilbreth, whose consulting work in time/motion engineering and kitchen efficiency branded her the "First Lady of Engineering" (Graham, 1999; Lepore, 2009). Because of the sex discrimination found in industrial environments of the time, the emerging home economics movement of the 1920s offered a viable outlet for Gilbreth to provide engineering research and advice, but within gender defined contexts (Graham, 1999).

In 1883, the first consulting firm, Arthur D. Little, was formed. The engineering focus of firms founded in the early part of the 20th century remained through the establishment of the Association of Consulting Management Engineers (ACME) in 1929. But, accounting soon played a more integral role in consulting work with Hoover's 1933 National Recovery Administration (NRA), which sought to institute fair business practices and break up monopolies (McKenna, 2006). To make themselves indispensable within the new government regulations, bankers and accountants became involved in providing consulting services. Around the 1920s, James McKinsey (who later established McKinsey & Company) had developed a "banker's survey" for consultants to use in assessing the financial performance of client organizations. Other big names in management consulting around that time were also those who contributed to the main cost accounting association journal (McKenna, 2006). "By the end of the 1930s, under [Marvin] Bower's stewardship, the term 'management consulting' began to replace 'management engineering,' and the professional management consultant was born" (McKinsey, 2013). However, in the 1930s, "the Glass-Steagal Act and SEC disclosure regulations forced commercial and investment bankers to abandon internal management consulting activities even as regulators mandated that they commission outside studies" (McKenna, 2006, p. 50). Thus, the historical emergence of the management consulting industry involved a complicated web of engineering innovation, accounting practices, organizational assessments, and government regulation. This pluralism within the industry continues today.

Management consulting services expanded in the United States during the post-World War II era. After World War II, management consulting helped shape economic governmental policy and the state's shift to economic growth as a signal for its legitimacy (McKenna, 2006). This is significant to discussions about the positioning of professionalism in contemporary corporate employment relationships. McKenna argues, "by the mid-1960s, their influence had become so great, yet so diffuse, that critics charged that the leading management consulting firms represented a virtual 'shadow government' in America" (p. 82). The 1950s and 1960s also brought management consulting into European markets as a way to diversify firm revenue sources and reduce potential risks from economic and regulatory fluctuations in the United States. The 1980s and 1990s were a time of exponential growth for the consulting industry and many projects during this time period focused on corporate culture and information technology (IT) implementations. After the recessions of the early 21st century, the large, traditional consulting firms diversified and expanded their breadth and depth of service offerings through strategic acquisitions, resulting in the consolidation of the industry and further entrenching the big, institutionalized firms.

The management consulting industry benefits from a "countercyclical demand" (IBISWorld, 2012). This means consulting services are needed *both* when times are tough (e.g., how do we reinvigorate our business and circumvent losses?) *and* when times are flush (e.g., how can we best leverage our current profits and competitive position?) The United States management consulting industry generated $160 billion in revenue in 2012 and relies upon corporate profit, government consumption and investment, and increasing numbers of businesses in order to drive growth (IBISWorld, 2013). There are low barriers to entry—anyone can call her/himself a consultant and there are low overhead expenses with performing this type of work. In 2009, 90% of management consulting firms employed less than 10 people (IBISWorld, 2013). The industry is highly fragmented, due to *both* the high number of market players *and* the diversity of service offerings. Only five firms own more than 1% of industry market share—Accenture (3.5%), McKinsey (2.9%), Deloitte (2.5%), Marsh & McLennan's Oliver Wyman and Mercer consulting groups (1.6%), and Boston Consulting Group (less than 1.5%) (IBISWorld, 2013).

Several current consultants commented on the high competition within the industry. In today's market, client demands are compressing consulting rates. Due to increased competition within the industry, the pricing structure is more variable. One consulting executive describes the impacts of rate compression within the industry in the following manner:

> Rates have been compressed. People want more for less. Do you do the same amount of work, but with less people? Do you outsource things? That's a real challenge in our industry. Because of that, it puts time constraints on time spent with family, friends, and personal pursuits. I don't think that's unique to management consulting, but rather, my hypothesis is that it is just a sign of our times.

Although time and materials pricing remains dominant, there is some movement towards charging a price against value delivered, with an expected share in the reward/outcomes. As the consultant quote above alludes to, depending on firm service offerings, capabilities, and cost pressures, some phases and/or types of project work may be outsourced as a way to manage costs.

The "face" of the corporate client who is purchasing these services has changed significantly over the past decade. As one consulting executive describes it:

> Companies are getting more savvy in who they bring in. So, a lot of my clients are no longer lifetime, utility members who maybe don't have the business sense. The person sitting across the table from me—the client—is now a University of Chicago MBA. So, the client we're interfacing with now is much more likely to be someone that's got some business savvy—a former consultant, or, whatever. People would come up and they would be operationally smart. Cost pressures increased, etcetera. They see how other people are successful and they bring in people who have more business savvy. So, therefore, the profile of who our clients are is starting to change. Let's face it, 10-15 years ago it was a bunch of old, gray-haired white guys running these companies. Now, it's not the same anymore.

The changing face of the client has created a more equitable power/knowledge dynamic in the client-consultant relationship. This coming together and partnering of equals will be important to discussions about the power-full potential of integration as an occupational practice in Chapter Five. A common myth is that management consultants go into companies and create problems to solve. But, in most cases, the business problem is defined already by the clients themselves. Several former consultants mentioned that their current industry employers involve them in decisions regarding the hiring and managing of consultants because of their previous experience in the industry.

One former consultant, who also spent time on the human resources side of the business staffing consultants, noted that consulting firms often assist consultants wishing to leave consulting to find industry jobs. The rationale is as follows:

> Say you have somebody like me, okay, who's leaving because of family, work-life balance. I loved the firm. I did—I loved [firm] more than anything in the entire world. Wouldn't you want to place me somewhere where you could utilize me? Wouldn't you work to help me find a job at a big company? It does happen all the time, though.

Consultants who are "seeded" into large corporations *both* offer long-term connections for potential future project work *and* provide a system of "checks and balances" for client-consultant engagements in this new era of consulting work. I also want to take a moment here to note the passionate use of the word "love" in this consultant account. Despite common academic and popular press conceptualizations of consultants as robotic and greedy, consultants in this study often used such positively infused words to describe the joys found in the intimacy, creativity, and challenge of crafting professional selves and power-full client relationships.

Consultants historically have played (and continue to play) an often invisible and influential role in political, economic, and social decision-making. The consultants with whom I spoke worked with companies as diverse as: Bank of America, AstraZeneca, the United States Marine Corps, Limited Brands, State Government of Wyoming, HarperCollins, and the United States Chamber of Commerce—and, industries ranging from: pharmaceuticals, utilities, transportation, media & entertainment, industrial goods (e.g., bulk chemicals), retail, grocery, oil & gas, government, travel & tourism, financial services, and nuclear security. Management consulting work has analyzed and transformed job processes, tasks, training, policies and procedures—fundamentally impacting employee daily work activities, relationships, and more broadly, what people know and how we operate within the world around us.

The Sweat of Management Consulting Work

The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Occupational Outlook describes consulting work in the following manner: "management analysts, often referred to as management consultants in private industry, analyze and propose ways to improve an organization's structure, efficiency, or profits." Research in the management consulting industry delineates four broad kinds of service offerings: traditional strategic business services, IT implementations, outsourcing services, and all other services (e.g., market research) (Muzio, Kirkpatrick & Kipping, 2011). In practice, these service offerings often overlap. For purposes of this study, I focus on traditional, business strategy management consultants with experience working for large established firms. These types of consulting firms (e.g., Accenture, Deloitte, Bain, McKinsey) are an institutionalized part of how large corporations manage business operations globally (McKenna, 2006).

Scholarship on the industry tends to focus on the knowledge-based work of management consulting. Some of this work highlights the industry's perceived success/failure of the occupation's professionalization efforts to establish jurisdictional control and expertise (Kipping & Engwall, 2002; McKenna, 2006; Muzio, Kirkpatrick, & Kipping, 2011). Other studies have examined consultant argumentation strategies and research approaches in legitimizing organizational objectives (Bouwmeester & van Werven, 2011; Sturdy, Clark, Fincham & Handley, 2009). Still others focus on management consulting's role in diffusing ideas and practices across varied business organizations (Sturdy & Wright, 2008; Whittle, 2008). Across all research, management consulting is positioned as an influential force in contemporary business operations around the world.

As previously noted, when we think broadly about management consulting work, it can be said that management consultants are hired to help clients solve business challenges. Because they work with many companies within and across industries, they are hired for their expertise and "best practices." This accumulated knowledge contributes to the prestige of the industry, as well as to the secrecy of the industry in the name of client confidentiality. Management consultants are considered "knowledge workers," as differentiated from liberal/independent professionals (e.g., doctors, lawyers) and organizational professionals (e.g., elite managers) (Reed, 1996). The following sections use the experiences of current and former management consultants to bring to life the day-to-day activities of management consultants, thus extending research on the industry that generalizes this line of work as idea diffusion and knowledge systematization. The everyday work of professional management consultants, as described in our interview discussions, revolves around personal training, client engagements, and internal commitments.

Training

Management consulting training often begins before formal employment begins. MBA programs, previous corporate experience, and select undergraduate programs/schools (e.g., engineering and business) provide anticipatory socialization and problem-solving methodologies that prepare consultants for day-to-day work. These anticipatory socialization technologies, such as personal upbringing and educational backgrounds, are discussed at more length in Chapter Four, as part of self-forming activities of the becoming work of professional consultants.

Once arriving on site, consultants attend orientations to firm practices, policies, and norms. The duration of these orientation training programs varies; however, there is usually a module devoted to professional conduct and ethics. At Accenture, we had three weeks of training in our home office (firm administration and functional area training) and three weeks of training at the firm's professional development center in St. Charles, IL (functional training application in mock-client settings). But, at Campbell Alliance, my first day with the firm was at the client site for the project kick-off. [Note: this has since changed and now new consultants complete a more traditional orientation program with the firm before beginning client projects.]

Consulting firm orientation programs offer both technical and situational training, with an emphasis on "soft skill" development through scenario-based training (e.g., "what happens when this happens or that happens?")

At several large firms, incoming consultants begin their tenure at the firm within what are known as "start groups." Depending upon the size of the office location, these groups can be small or large. When I started in the New York City office of Accenture, my start group included about 25 people. But, I trained most closely with my change management cohort—a smaller group of about six people, most of whom were "experienced hires," like me. I had friends who started in the Charlotte office of Accenture whose entire office start group was seven people. One former consultant describes start groups in the following manner:

> I think there's something to start groups. In undergrad, everyone in class with you is pretty darn bright. They're smart, challenging, and whatnot. And, then you get to your start group and take it up a notch. Now, students are not only smart, but also probably high achievers, very driven, and there's this cohort that you're moving down the line with. You're working for a company where the median IQ and drive and experience is—the bar is really high.

The start groups provide informal and formal social networks and support. Start groups share gossip, norms, stories, and introductions to other colleagues that help initiate and socialize new firm members. One of my friend's start group members shared a personal budgeting excel spreadsheet with her start group members to help everyone budget their newfound income now that they were no longer in college. But, these colleagues are also those with whom you compare yourself at promotion time. Once one member of the start group is promoted, the rest of the group is often driven to achieve the same outcome.

One of my favorite professional development activities in preparation for my promotion to manager at Accenture was assisting the firm's change management training program at its St. Charles, IL training facility. During this time, I volunteered to perform the role of client (I never lost my love for theatre performances, apparently.) After participating in a one-week train-the-trainer session on how to facilitate the program learning outcomes, I sat in an office and new consultant teams would come to my office for direction on their assignment. After working on various tasks, research, and activities throughout the day, the consultant teams (usually three or four people) would schedule time to meet with me to present their ideas or deliverables and receive feedback. During those meetings I would critique work, comment on group dynamics, and mimic my own experiences with clients.

The small group of us filling this client role in the training program enjoyed instant messaging each other about new ways to surprise the consultant groups when they came to our offices. At the end of the day, I would go into a couple of the consultant classrooms (groups of 25 people or so) and provide generalized feedback to the teams on my observations on their deliverables and sociability based upon my "real-life" knowledge as an experienced consultant. This type of training and mentorship helps new consultants learn the ropes and develop skills needed for successfully serving clients on project engagements. It also provides experienced consultants with training and mentoring opportunities in preparation for their managerial responsibilities.

There are a variety of ongoing training and development activities, such as the one I just described, that management consultants are expected to engage in as part of their professional development. Formal firm training programs and classes assist management consultants with developing skills and capabilities in a variety of areas, thus enabling consultants to achieve various firm, client, and self-development needs/aspirations. One consultant remarked that she really appreciated taking an emotional intelligence training course offered at her firm because "it's up to me to get better at reading what their [the client's] style is." Other training programs consultants mentioned at their firms included: project management, best practices, industry changes, conducting organizational assessments, graphic design, developing transition plans, facilitation classes, conflict management, and the millennial mind.

One consulting executive noted that she places a priority on training that builds communication skills: "I personally spend a lot of time on economies of words, and the descriptive nature of words, my choice of words so that communication is more effective across all of the different styles." Consultants can take classes online or travel to well-known training institutes, such as the Bell Leadership Institute, for seminars and coaching. One former consultant mentioned that her firm paid for her to earn certificates in leadership and management through an online Harvard Business School program, as part of her professional development plan.

Client Engagements

One consulting executive described management consulting work as the "paper, words, advice, and guidance that the client organization turns into profit, enterprise, or production." In consulting engagements, everything revolves around the client relationship and the project "deliverable"—the contractually determined output of consulting labor. The term "client engagement" evokes a critical relational element (client: an orientation to the Other) and promise/commitment to contractual obligations (engagement: an ongoing, monogamous relationship). This is important because a large portion of firm business comes from repeat clients. One consultant estimates 80% of his firm's business comes from repeat clients. As will be discussed in the telos section of Chapter Four, many consultants derive great pleasure from the intimacy, trust, and integrity of these long-term business partnerships.

Although variable, strategy consulting firms tend to have projects with shorter durations and higher price points, usually with some form of follow-on work. Firms focusing on IT implementations tend to have longer project durations with larger numbers of consultants working on them. Smaller firms tend to have multiple projects with mixed durations (consultants might work on one or two projects at the same time). One former consultant reflected that the type and duration of project influenced approaches to client relationships. Most projects are structured around a solution development lifecycle (e.g., design, build, test, implement). Using consultant descriptions of their own work experiences, I've attempted to give a taste of common project tasks. While not exhaustive, it is representative of the kinds of day-to-day tasks consultants interviewed were/are involved in from a client solution delivery perspective.

Strategy projects tend to involve helping clients answer broad, high-level business planning questions. This can translate into:

- strategic planning projects (e.g., "what are the specific things we're going to spend our money on in the next year?" or "should we buy this company?")
- executing leveraged buyouts ("what are the attributes of this business?")
- organizational planning (e.g., "are we going to re-org? Are we going to change the way we do business?")
- mergers and acquisitions work (e.g., "should we diversify our holdings?")

Strategy work can involve analyzing business operations, identifying cost cutting initiatives, rethinking organizational structures, and designing processes for risk management and human capital development. One consultant described work in his firm's private equity group as follows:

> Basically, we serve private equity clients as they are working due diligence to potential targets that they may acquire. So, if the private equity fund is interested in buying a company, they get far enough down the process, then they hire someone like [firm] to do some research on the industry, on the competitive position of the target, of other potential factors that could play a role in their investment pieces.

Much of what this entails is "combing through data" and "getting down into the weeds." Consultants are expected to have familiarity with an assortment of programs and tools, such as Excel, depending upon the needs/goals of the data analysis. This can be challenging as some clients use particular software programs, which may or may not be the ones consultants use on their own or within the firm.

Consultants make sense of massive data sets and draw conclusions such as "you know, people in your strategy group are spending half their time operationally—filling out purchase orders." Based on these analyses, recommendations are developed to address the operational issue. Strategy work involves knowing where to find the relevant data points, gathering the data quickly, conducting data analysis, making sense of data analysis findings, and communicating all this complex information in an understandable way to diverse audiences.

IT projects involve building new software, determining what processes are used, identifying who should do them, and outlining which tasks maximize efficiency. This can include:

- building a system (e.g., "take widget A or B and build it out based on somebody's analysis")
- evaluating different vendors for software
- testing usability and information architecture (e.g., "they looked to me for guidance on the way the screens reacted to one another")

- making existing systems more efficient (e.g., “we have system A and system B—they don’t talk to each other”)
- automating manual processes (e.g., “building a payment system that dealt with escrow and things like that online”)

Some IT projects involve working as an outsourced arm of the client organization. In this manner, consulting teams enable client organizations to “flex their staff up and down and not worry about the overhead and management of building an internal team.” Whether as outsourced team members or traditional consulting partners, consultants are sometimes asked to work the IT help desk. One former consultant considered this early professionalism training—as it taught him how to “take getting berated by a customer” and “how to deal with pressure.”

In terms of particular IT projects, one consultant talked about an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) implementation for a large company that involved testing interfaces, writing and executing test scripts, and developing current and future state process maps. For a PeopleSoft implementation, another consultant “dealt with the server, database setup, loading patches, customer support, testing, development of reports and application customizations, and redefining business processes under the new software.” Another consultant worked on automating manual publishing at Victoria’s Secret. This involved identifying steps to cut out and steps to add in alongside the new technology.

Government projects often entail grant and proposal writing. As one government consultant claims, “budget numbers don’t scare me.” But, work in this area also revolves around identifying and redesigning business compliance processes to meet certain rules and regulations. Given the indeterminacy, at times, of state and federal approval processes, projects in this industry might necessitate regular negotiation of staffing plans, scheduling, and contract deliverables. Government projects also can involve a focus around procurement and supply chains—more specifically, how to make these processes more efficient.

One current consultant describes her consulting work with government agencies as primarily logistical. Her main responsibilities include: planning meetings, preparing materials, communicating with agencies and private sector groups, answering inquiries from stakeholders, and answering client day-to-day questions. As a subject matter expert, she often responds to "fire drills"—changes in government direction and/or needs. Other consultants with experience working for government clients have assisted in areas such as safety and interoperability, nuclear security, and the United States Chamber of Commerce. With his background as a financial analyst, one government consultant analyzed federal budgets, wrote congressional justifications, and developed resource allocation plans (e.g., "how to get money and how to allocate and spend that money.") This included evaluating pro forma statements, judging the economic sustainability of agencies, developing risk mitigation recommendations, and turning all this information into "consumable reports."

In junior positions, there is a lot of administrative coordination and execution that is done on client engagements. One consultant, who has worked for three major firms, explained that an early challenge for new consultants, but one that gets easier and more intuitive over time, is figuring out on a new client engagement: "How does this organization get stuff done and how do I make sure I'm working with the system rather than against it?" For junior staff members, senior consultants often direct this. As another consultant remembered about projects at junior levels: "It's about 'here are the deliverables, here's the methodology used to obtain those deliverables, now execute.'" In order to execute project assignments, consultants frequently: research and analyze data sets, document key issues/challenges/questions, formulate arguments/rationales, identify key project stakeholders, conduct interviews and focus groups, create business process maps, outline schedules and budgets, develop code, generate project templates, and participate in meetings with various clients and stakeholders to gather information. An exciting aspect to this work for many consultants is the cross-functional interaction and teamwork these tasks require, which contributes to consultant professional development.

Consultants, in general, spend a good bit of time researching, developing, reviewing, and presenting PowerPoint decks. “You know consultants love their PowerPoints.” The professional polish of work documents is what transforms the consultant work product into a “deliverable,” ready for client review. As one consultant explains:

> For a consultant, the deliverable is the money-maker. So, there’s a lot of emphasis or importance placed on project documents, deliverables, presentations, materials. And, so, to this day, I approach every presentation or slide deck as a deliverable. I’m very diligent about their appearance, every word is carefully chosen. Spelling and grammatical and formatting standards are all things that I value in anything I create.

In some respects, the deliverable is an extension of the consulting brand and must be perfected. Not only must the PowerPoint reflect professional polish, but so also must the delivery/deliverer of the presentation. In talking about marked moments of professionalism, several consultants relayed stories of savvy executive PowerPoint presentation facilitation. The combination of confidence, passion, aesthetic grace (of the PowerPoint and the presenter), and intellectual horsepower seemingly creates a power-full affect. When executed with mastery, the PowerPoint presentation holds significant potential for influence—whether selling contracts or recommendations. When executed poorly, the consulting firm risks losing business.

The dynamic I just described of management consulting PowerPoint development and presentation is, I believe, unique. It is a professional technique that is cultivated through years of professional services work, perhaps. Again, several consultants mentioned in our interviews that this is a professional action worth emulating and striving for in one's own professional development as a consultant. To be honest, it had been several years since I had seen this dynamic in practice. At a recent communication conference, I was so taken by an organizational communication scholar's savvy PowerPoint presentation that I went up to him after the session to inquire about his management consulting experience. I was surprised to learn that he was not a former consultant. I share this story because although the concept of professional presentation skills seems intuitive and easily trained, it is quite difficult to capture and master the integration of passion and rationality into the power-full and influential affect characteristic of professional management consulting presentations.

At more senior levels of the organization, managers and partners hold most of the responsibility for client relations. They deliver the PowerPoint presentations, field client questions and concerns, frame staffing (consultant "roll-on" and "roll-off") decisions with clients, and, of course, sell work and negotiate contracts. Executives have business development metrics related to utilization that they are expected to meet. As one former consulting executive explained, an executive might have a million dollar quota. This metric can be fulfilled in a number of ways: through billable client hours, time developing client proposals, and closing client contracts. As such, there is often a battle for resources at this level to assist in attaining these performance measurements. Favoritism is not uncommon. But, this is a reciprocal relationship. As one current consultant notes, "the partnership class is changing, but it's still very much about who you know."

Experience across industries and clients enables firms to systematize business knowledge into firm "best practices." This is part of what clients pay for when seeking out consultants. The everyday impact consultants can have on global business knowledge and practice is exemplified in the following story about a consultant's everyday work:

> I was really providing the strategic visions for disaster recovery, and that kind of stuff for major companies. I told [major publishing company], "you can't keep all your books in one warehouse." What's really funny is when you're sitting there and you have a meeting with the CIO and you have a quote: "your disaster recovery location should be more than 50 miles away from your primary location—it's just best practice." When you see that quote on the cover of the Wall Street Journal, and you know you said it to the guy, you're like, "wow!" So, that's the type of stuff I did on a day-to-day basis.

Management consulting work holds the potential for positively influencing the world around us and the impact of global business operations on human lives. As demonstrated in this narrative, client organizations make the news, not the consulting workers behind the scenes. Stories of productive management consulting partnerships and positive changes in the world rarely make the news. Perhaps because of this power-full influence management consulting holds on global business operations, the stories that make headlines are those where the potential of consulting affect is undermined by cases of financial malfeasance. The compelling stories of our society are seemingly those rooted in fear, weakness, and disaster. Stories of integrity, love, faith, and strength rarely make it into the public sphere. This is certainly the case for management consulting work.

Not all work is as high-impact as the story the consultant told about the Wall Street Journal quote. In fact, most of it is not that glamorous, despite popular culture representations (e.g., Showtime's television show about management consulting misconduct, *House of Lies*). At the end of the day, most consultants say they do what needs to be done to "minimize [client] concerns come Monday morning." For one consulting manager, this included physically moving and washing desks one weekend during a merger and acquisition. For many new consultants, including myself, a lot of time is spent photocopying, putting together presentation binders, and scheduling and coordinating meeting logistics. I spent a good chunk of time in my early days as a consultant ordering and picking up lunch for my team.

At the end of a client engagement, there is often some sort of roll-off commemoration. A shared mentality of "work hard, play hard" came up in several interviews. The "play hard" part of the equation seems to have shifted a bit, perhaps due to cost pressures, increased industry competition, and public scrutiny. The most extravagant roll-off celebration I experienced as a consultant was a weekend cruise to the Bahamas after a one-year financial services project. But, not all are that extreme. As one consultant explains:

> They're going to demand a lot from you and expectations are high and they have some of these dinners and trips as a thank you. We're finishing up a project and we've been working 80 hours. Let's go blow off some steam.

There may or may not be some "down time" spent in the firm office after the completion of a client project. In some firms, staffing is done by HR associates who manage practice area resource demands. In other firms, there is more of a culture in which consultants must network with senior executives in order to get staffed onto the next project. If a consultant does not "roll on" to another project immediately, then the time in between projects can be used for professional development purposes or firm initiatives.

Regardless of consultant role on a client engagement or the type of client project, professionalism is integral to how management consulting work is performed. It is through professionalism that project outputs are given value. It is through professionalism that the creative potential of the "client engagement" is manifested. As most of consultant time is spent on client engagements (rather than in training or as part of internal projects), client-service activities provide the contextual landscape through which professional consultants develop understandings of self and in relation to the broader, occupational collective.

Internal Commitments

One way management consultants can demonstrate professionalism is through a commitment to activities contributing to the firm's development and success. Firm development activities center around developing client service offerings and bringing in and developing professional consultants. Internal commitments are a way for consultants to "give back" to the firm. One consultant mentioned that she enjoyed the punctuation internal projects give to the intensity of client engagements. Internal projects can offer consultants a break from the rigors, stress, and deadlines of client projects. As many consultants work in geographically dispersed locations, internal projects can offer a welcomed respite from the demands of travel and the long hours spent at client sites. In my experience, the normal business hours of internal project work enabled me to catch back up with family, friends, and the banal aspects of home life (such as actually cooking my own dinner and cleaning my apartment!)

A key professional activity related to internal commitment is intellectual property generation. As previously noted, firm "best practices" reflect intellectual property that is generated from working with many companies across industries and functional areas. This information is systematized as project templates or methodologies or even as service offerings that capitalize on client interest in knowing "what works and what doesn't work." Intellectual property development from a firm perspective broadly includes brainstorming ideas, testing concepts, and developing business leads based on those ideas. One consulting executive summarized intellectual property generation as: "building out market strategies, fostering templates and examples of what we've done, developing new approaches for new and emerging trends, and building a market strategy for the firm to link emerging trends to client offerings."

Another aspect of internal work is mentoring. Senior consultants and executives are expected to facilitate mentoring within the firm. This may take the form of informal social networking activities or more formal participation in mentoring circles and performance evaluation responsibilities. Investing in mentoring junior consultants is part of consulting executives' daily activities. This could be through meetings, emails, phone calls, gathering feedback about the mentee, and/or completing evaluations about the junior consultants' performance. Mentoring is fundamental to the becoming activities of professional management consultants, as it affords the opportunity for junior team members to emulate the professionalism of consulting executives, as will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

Another way consultants participate in the firm community is through university recruiting events. Consultants can volunteer to go back to their undergraduate or graduate schools to talk about their experiences with the firm and what it is like being a consultant. This can include facilitating an information session. It also often includes a social event, which may take the form of hosting a reception at a local bar or restaurant. If recruits are invited to the firm's office for a day of interviews, consultants involved in the recruiting process might take the recruits out to dinner and a theatre performance. Consultants are expected to represent the firm and conduct one's self in a professional manner, thus contributing to the anticipatory socialization of potential management consulting recruits. For me, professionalism in these recruiting contexts often involved projecting a comportment of confidence and affluence.

The everyday work of professional management consultants involves training, client engagements, and internal commitments. Based upon this overview of the management consulting industry and the "sweat" of management consultant work, I now would like to address professionalism as an integral element to the value proposition sold to clients when they purchase management consulting services. In doing so, my intention is to create the business case for professionalism as a commodity marketed, bought and sold, however implicitly, within the client-consultant relational exchange.

The Management Consulting Value Proposition

The management consulting value proposition is predicated upon professionalism. Clients recognize consultants as Other, as different, and consultants likewise recognize the client as Other (fundamental to a professional services line of work.) The various means, techniques, and discourses shaping professionalism reify this important relational dynamic. It is not that clients cannot perform the work internally, as several current and former consultants were quick to point out. It is by gaining an external perspective that client organizations are enabled to propel business operations in new ways. Professionalism assists in symbolically and discursively reifying these differential boundaries between client and consultant. Professionalism is an aesthetic way of life for management consultants. It brings together various consulting firms and consultants with varied industry-focus, functional alignment, and project tasks. Professionalism is a crucial attribute of management consulting professional identification.

Although the specific outputs of consultant work are important to the perceived success of consulting engagements, consultant comments suggest it is the professionalism with which these deliverables are created and delivered that constitutes the consulting value proposition. Consider the following definitions consultants gave about professionalism:

- "It's the value added to deliverables"
- "[It] is so engrained in the culture, the philosophy of consulting"
- "It's just the way you approach things—the way that you do it"

Consultant narratives position professionalism as an ethic or manner of conducting one's self through which clients are promised a particular kind of relational experience and aesthetic quality to project interactions and deliverables. As many consultants noted in various ways, standards of professionalism in *both* relationships *and* deliverables signal value and quality in relation to the high fees being paid by clients for consulting engagements. Or, in other words, the high price clients pay for consulting services is warranted if executed with professionalism. This suggests professionalism is commodified—and, serves as an organizing technology through which boundaries between self and Other are constructed and sustained. As such, integration is possible—partnerships that hold the potential for achieving certain ends through creative, democratic collaboration among equals. The boundary between self and Other (consultant and client) is not to allude to a dichotomous professional-unprofessional distinction (i.e., consultants are professional and clients are unprofessional or vice versa), but simply to note that professionalism *both* maintains a separation between consultant and client bodies *and* provides a method for integrative partnering (to be discussed in more depth in Chapter Five).

Yet, the most common response I received to the question asking participants about their definition of professionalism was, "what do you mean by professionalism?" This reinforces the ambiguity of the term put forth by Cheney & Ashcraft (2007). Professionalism is a taken-for-granted concept employed in a variety of contexts and usages, but it is difficult to pinpoint and articulate. Because of this ephemeral quality, professionalism is a floating signifier—open to shifting, and *both* constitutive *and* contradictory individual, organizational, and occupational meanings. Several consultants observed that professionalism "varies by organization" and thus what is acceptable at the client site might not be acceptable from a firm perspective. This helps explains one consultant's comment that professionalism is "instinctive," and that "good consultants" are able to accurately interpret and adjust to changing professionalism expectations. I heard from several consultants that my findings in this regard would be very helpful in terms of defining consultant expectations and helping firms develop training courses around professionalism. One consultant noted his surprise that professionalism expectations are "so word of mouth and anecdotal," especially in an industry that places such high value on codifying intellectual topics.

To give a flavor for the various ways consultants think about professionalism, I have consolidated and categorized consultant definitions into three broad areas: personal, organizational, and occupational meanings. Of course, these definitions overlap and intersect beyond these divisions. I outline these professionalism definitions as a contextual backdrop for understanding the becoming activities of professional management consultants in Chapter Four. But, again, my intention is not to focus on fixing these definitions, as notions of professionalism are contingent, contextual, fleeting, and always up for interpretation. Moving forward, I focus on professional action, rather than attribute.

1. **Personal professionalism**: savvy interpersonal communication skills; bodily comportment; conservative dress; language; mannerisms; emotional intelligence; being respectful of clients, colleagues, and superiors; not yelling or being too loud; general attractiveness; Type A personality; good hygiene; what your Mom and Dad taught you; not making mistakes; travel etiquette; honesty; integrity; working hard; ability to tell and communicate a story; toning down sarcasm; adaptability; poise and confidence; and, for women, not being too sexy
2. **Organizational professionalism**: persuasive and aesthetically appealing PowerPoint presentations; no conflict or big waves; synonymous with culture; delivering high service

value for the client; upholding firm values and norms; and appropriately managing client resources

3. **Occupational professionalism**: trading on your reputation; an intangible product of the consulting industry; not creating an 'us versus them' mentality; doing what you say you're going to do; successfully managing relationships and communication; and quality metrics (e.g., price-value relationship in regards to the client-consultant relationship)

The interviews also included discussions of the potential negative impacts professionalism may have on consultants. Based on consultant responses, it seems management consulting professionalism expectations can affect negatively: the body (requires homogeneity in terms of style, dress, mannerisms), emotions (requiring reserve), outside relationships, family planning, approachability, personal authenticity, innovation (low tolerance for mistakes or anything other than "best practices"), and the ability to have a voice in and/or challenge decisions. Violations of management consulting professionalism expectations are memorable when they occur in management consulting work. But, the rarity of everyday unprofessionalism suggests professionalism expectations are either already known (a reflection of upbringing, innate personality traits, prior corporate experience and/or targeted university recruiting strategies) and/or quickly assimilated (through observation, training, and/or mentoring) when consultants start at a firm. However, when acts of unprofessionalism do occur, they are often linked to individual explanatory demographics, such as age, gender, level in hierarchy, and/or tenure with firm.

For example, ideas and ways of doing things outside of firm "best practices" or systemic "knowledge exchanges" are not always welcomed and can be seen as unprofessional. One former consultant tells the following story about an innovative coder on one of his first projects:

> I remember the first project I worked on, someone else was in my start group, same age as me, had been with the firm for a year or two. They were really, from a coding perspective, from a developer perspective, he was really light years ahead of other folks. And, he definitely liked to challenge them. If someone told him to do X and Y, he wouldn't do it. You know, "I don't think that's the right way to do it." He wasn't necessarily a senior person—he was kind of a junior person. I think he got rated pretty well at the end of his first year—he was a really excellent coder—but, I think the uniformity, or people always questioning. I mean, yes, you should be able to question authority but, only to a certain level. There's a boundary. And, eventually when the dot com era started to grow, he bailed out right away. He was like "I don't like all these constraints they're putting on me."

There are contradictory professionalism expectations operating here. There is the sense that management consulting professionalism demands *both* innovative ideas and technical expertise for client-value *and* conformity to established firm best practices. But, in the end, unprofessionalism is coded as a rebel spirit in a junior staff member who had not been with the firm for very long. Technical expertise and innovation are not valued as deeply as professional expectations related to hierarchical positioning and use of proven best practices.

Interview stories about management consulting unprofessionalism also illuminated an interesting insight about the combined masculinity and femininity of management consulting work. Take the case of the following consultant and his description of a team colleague on one of his projects:

> The girl I worked with is one that everybody loves being around, loves having her on the team. She's maybe a little on the, probably a little vulgar. So, definitely on the less professional side. And, I think, the impression that people got of her is if one thing goes wrong, or she makes an error, they instantly can kind of attribute it to, "oh, well, she's not that professional, she's maybe less mature." I should point out the fact she is younger—she's probably 25 or 26. And, I think it's not so much they're saying, "oh, well, she's young and still needs to learn." I think when there is an error, they suddenly have justification for "yeah, I know." This kind of fits into the image that they're building of her, because she's not as professional. So, I think if you're unprofessional, your mistakes can get magnified under that lens of "you know, this person is not ready to handle interactions with clients," and they haven't built their business acumen to the point where somebody would really want to push to higher responsibility. So, while this may be a fun person to be around. Like, she sends out an email saying we're having a happy hour, I

> definitely make an effort to see her. And, she's a lot of fun to see. But, at the same time, when comes to engagements, she doesn't get recommended as strongly for a team.

While providing insights into the interpersonal dynamics on consultant projects, this narrative points to contradictory constructions of professionalism. Professionalism demands *both* social interaction outside of work *and* gendered, age-appropriate behaviors. Unprofessionalism is coded in this case as acting in ways unbecoming to a professional young woman. In addition, the anecdote suggests management consulting work involves cultivating *both* business acumen (traditionally perceived as masculine work) *and* social relationships (traditionally perceived as feminine work.) Professionalism is the mediating technology that balances appropriate actions in both regards.

Implications

Given these descriptions of consultant work, I would like to highlight three points. First, professionalism is a key variable in the management consulting value proposition. Without professionalism, project work loses value in the eyes of clients and consultants, themselves. The high cost paid for management consulting services is seen as reasonable, if services are delivered in a professional way (the manifestation of which, as discussed, is ambiguously and contingently constructed). Second, management consulting work holds the potential for influence and change in global business operations, and therefore ultimately, ways of life. Consultants are heavily involved in decision-making, resource planning, and operational strategies at international corporations. The *potentia* for shaping our world in positive ways, *both* as individuals *and* as an occupational collective, is substantial.

Lastly, an interesting dynamic is at play within this occupational line of work. Management consulting exists at the intersection of *both* traditional associations of masculine *and* feminine work. Consultants must *both* cultivate intimate client relationships *and* maintain emotional reserve within the demands for logical, rational, and disinterested organizational solutions. Thus, management consulting offers an additional occupational exemplar for the dynamic tensions between gender and organizing practices. In formulating a methodological perspective bridging critical, discursive, and feminist approaches to organizational studies, Ashcraft & Mumby (2004) examine the historically and contingently constructed professional identities of airline pilots. Their work looks at the symbolic and material interplays shaping constructions of masculinity and femininity (within the intersecting planes of race, class, and sexuality) in the airline industry. This *both-and* perspective is characteristic of management consulting work, as well.

Management consulting professionalism *both* encourages *and* regulates relational intimacy with clients. As participant responses indicate, it is a challenge to negotiate this tension. How does one show caring, interest, and openness while at the same time demonstrating objectivity, neutrality, and disinterest? Management consulting professionalism involves an emotional intelligence and interpersonal expertise that challenges traditional notions of masculine and feminine work through a required synthesis of rationality and emotion. It would be interesting to explore how individual consultants manage these tensions, as tied to broader social Discourses of performance expectations related to notions of embodied difference. For example, one consultant remarked that her clients love the gay partner on their team, who despite being with the firm for many years only recently openly discussed his sexuality. Within the client-consultant relationship, what trade-offs does this partner make within the competing frameworks of sexuality, masculinity/femininity, and managerialism for the sake of professionalism. In addition, how do these choices (demands?) impact perceptions of rationality, passion, self, and Other (client)?

Disciplinary Constructions of Professionalism

As an object of study across a variety of disciplinary domains, professionalism, and its related constructs, the professional and professions, offers important insights into work and life. The following section *both* provides additional contextualization to the consultant narratives described in the previous section *and* outlines the contributions of sociology, management studies, organizational communication, and popular press texts in shaping the role of professionalism in work and occupations. This background will also set the stage for discussions of the social, discursive, and political effects of occupational collectives discussed in Chapter Five.

Sociology

Occupations are social constructions of a work-related collective body. As an analytical tool, occupations combine similar job activities across different organizations and industries, which denotes the attributes of a particular line of work. Professions usually are understood as bounded (discursively, materially, and symbolically) occupations with special status as experts and/or moral authorities (e.g., doctors, lawyers), often as a result of extensive education, training and licensing. Although contested within the contemporary corporate landscape of neoliberal commodification of expert knowledge (Leicht & Fennell, 2001), traditional notions of professions are founded upon a dialogic service relationship between the professional and the client. Leicht & Fennell (2001) argue that professionalism is about the relationship between the professional individual and the client; whereas, the professionalization project is about the intersections of relationships between the professional, other professionals, and other occupational domains, in addition to the client relationship. I believe the concept of professionalism, both as an occupational professionalization project and as an individual behavioral expectation, is a mimetic response—an attempt by individuals, occupations and organizations to replicate the social, moral, and political power of established professions originating from the dialogic service relationship.

Part of the sociological interest in professions and professionalism as a collective body may rest within Durkheim's (1895) belief that "what constitutes social facts are the beliefs, tendencies, and practices of the group taken collectively" (p. 145). A key goal for occupations attempting to professionalize business operations is social closure—or, in others words, constructing group boundaries. Many occupations take steps, including garnering state support and capitalizing on Congressional legislation, to delineate and control unique occupational jurisdictions (Abbott, 1988). Macdonald (1995), for example, describes the process of social closure as "the occupation and its organization attempts to close access to the occupation, to its knowledge, to its education, training and credentials and to its markets in services and jobs; only 'eligibles' will be admitted" (p. 29). Through these efforts to professionalize and achieve social closure, occupations become productive analytical categories for researching and discussing social and structural divisions of labor.

There is an extensive body of sociological research on the occupational division of labor. In some cases, research has taken structural approaches. These studies position the work of professionals in relation to traits (Brint, 1994; Lammers and Garcia, 2009; Wilensky, 1964), social functionality (Begun, 1986), American culture (Bledstein, 1976) and power relationships (Freidson, 2007). In other cases, research takes various process orientations. These studies look at the professionalization of occupations through particular steps (Larson, 1977; MacDonald, 1995; Wilensky, 1964), as well as through spheres of jurisdictional competition (Abbott, 1988). These studies primarily are based upon the traditional, liberal professions of law, medicine, and accounting, and, generally, do not reflect the corporate colonization and knowledge economy characteristic of 21st century post-Fordist organizing practices.

The changing nature of work in postmodernity has shifted standard understandings of occupational divisions. In our contemporary knowledge economy, specialized knowledge becomes the domain of everyone—a notion exemplified by the fact that anyone can become a management consulting and provide business advice. This suggests a new permeability in occupational categories that is productively analyzed through discursive frameworks. The rules for who and what is considered professional are changing (Adams, 2012) and thus warrant new conceptual tools for assessing the effects and impacts of such changes.

A major contribution of sociological literature on the division of labor is in revealing the gendered nature of professional work. This work ranges from insights into "gender as a proxy for productivity" in organizational restructuring processes (Skuratowicz & Hunter, 2004, p. 93), occupational feminization through gendered labor market queues (Reskin, 1991), gender pay gap trends (Blau & Kahn, 2007), gendered constitution of organizing forms and practices (Acker, 1990), and gendered strategies of professionalization projects (Witz, 1990). The sociology of gender in work blends economic analysis with discursive practice to gain an understanding of the reification of patriarchy within bounded analytical categories such as labor markets, occupations/professions, and organizational structures—impacting who can be professional at work.

Sociological work on professionalism is helpful because research has established boundaries "delineating a distinctive way of organizing work" (Muzio, Kirkpatrick & Kipping, 2011, p. 806). But, fixing notions of professionalism as a set of workplace attributes, practices, behaviors, skills and/or values within bounded occupational professionalization projects elides the contingent, discursive constructions undergirding the privileging of certain kinds of expertise and certain kinds of people. Occupational structures, like professions and professionalism, “help shape the system of work by providing the labels and categories we use to bundle tasks and duties into positions, jobs, and occupations—in effect telling analysts, employers, and recruiters what is salient about work and what is not” (Committee on Techniques for the Enhancement of Human Performance, 1999, p. 164). These analytical categories can then be co-opted and optimized to extract particular efficiencies for organizational/occupational benefit.

My project brings a discursive lens to studying professionalism. While not new to sociological occupational studies (see for example, Fournier, 1999; Larson, 1993), the becomings of management consulting professionalism move beyond conceptualizations of discourse as spoken or written text—a tool in the service of organizational/occupational objectives. Instead, this study positions the discursive construction of professionalism as a technology mobilizing action, bodies, and language, with particular affects and effects on the self and the collective.

Management Studies

Management studies of professions often take the perspective that work defines people. As such, there is a move to take sociological understandings of occupational divisions of labor and optimize the resources within those boundaries. Professionalism in this sense is about the relationship between the professional and the employing firm. The benefits of this scholarship are to “operationalize the distinctions so they can be unambiguously deployed in empirical research” (Adler, P. S., Kwon, S. W., & Heckscher, C., 2008, p. 371). Work in this area often reflects an underlying assumption about work’s purpose in human lives: “to produce products people need and to help produce better people” (Gini, 2000, p. 209). As such, professionalism is "reframed in terms of behavioural, attitudinal and presentational traits such as commitment, flexibility and client focus" (Muzio, Kirkpatrick & Kipping, 2011, p. 818) that can be trained, molded, and commodified, as needed.

This perspective can be seen in studies that take professionalism as a discursive tool—wielded in the interests of organizations/occupations for the achievement of professionalization projects. For example, Anderson-Gough, Grey and Robson (1998) examine the socialization of trainee accountants and find that "part of being a professional person involves a 'regulation of the self' in terms of the articulation of a professional discourse, the following of formal and informal norms of conduct" (p. 1). Some firm-level initiatives to craft elite identities function as disciplinary mechanisms for employee constructions of occupational identities that position employees as superior to Others (Alvesson & Robertson, 2006). Several researchers (Grey, 1997; Kipping, 2011; McKenna, 2006) found the use of jargon a key part of the professionalization process for management consultants, particularly in claims of expertise to clients. Discourse in these accounts represents a top-down force to control employee behavior in particular ways.

Because management studies often take a functional perspective of professionalism—how people, resources, and institutions are used strategically—the experiences of employees as active, resistant, productive, engaged bodies are sometimes overshadowed. Positioning the becoming artistry inherent to professional identity work—"life as a work of art"—makes a significant contribution in this regard, as it brings a complexity to management constructions and utilizations of professionalism not yet addressed in the literature.

A recent trend in management literature concerns the apparent declining power of professional occupational categories (Muzio & Kirkpatrick, 2011; Reed, 1996). Underlying this concern is a view that "by possessing and controlling esoteric knowledge and skill relevant to the organization and management of everyday activity and institutional behaviour, expert groups put themselves in a potentially powerful position within the corporate, occupational and class structures of advanced capitalist political economies" (Reed, 1996, p. 576). In this manner, professionalism becomes a buffer, a shield, against the precarity, risk, and instability of the contemporary neoliberal market. As corporations more frequently employ professionals, there is concern about the "hollowing out" of professional ideals and claims to expertise in the name of market demands (Kipping, 2001; Leicht & Fennel, 2001; Muzio & Kirkpatrick, 2011; Reed, 1996). Concern over the "hollowing out" of professions suggests power can be taken away or optimized in calculated organizational/occupational interests. Professionalism in this sense is tied to the effectiveness of occupational boundary maintenance.

As will be discussed in Chapter Three, the theoretical framework of power/knowledge employed for purposes of this study highlight the capacity for action within management consulting. This capacity and potential for strength, power, and positivity is inherent to the collective body and cannot be reduced. Although it is possible for individuals and professions to act against their nature (decreasing potential for human flourishing), a "hollowing out" of a profession's capacity for positive affect is more likely an attempt to stunt the power-full nature of a collective body acting in the interests of a dialogic relationship. Actions to shield or protect occupational boundaries are reactive. As I argue in Chapter Five, rather than sedimenting collective attributes and boundaries, a more productive conceptualization of occupations emphasizes integrative action, which redirects extant management studies' emphasis on the political defensive maneuvering within and without the occupational boundary markers. Or, in other words, I intend to argue for collective notions (occupations/professions), which emphasize function (action) over form (identity).

Organizational Communication

Organizational communication research on professionalism challenges professions/ professionalism as a fixed category and recasts it as a dynamic, contingent and political effect of a variety of broader discursive articulations (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007, Deetz, 1992). The studies in this area focus on the communicative construction of professionalism, difference, and identity in organizing contexts. Organizational communication work in this area tends to reflect a critical perspective, giving attention to the ways in which professionalism reflects strategic power/knowledge relations.

Some organizational communication work has taken a Foucauldian approach by studying professionalism as a discursive disciplinary mechanism. This research explores how professionalism expectations differentially impact people's experiences at work. Trethewey (1999) interviewed professional women about the female professional body. She found "women understand, position, and discipline their own and others' professional bodies" (p. 423) in particular ways. There are rewards for learning how to embody a set of professional comportments, norms, and signals. "Women feel more comfortable, confident, and 'professional' when engaging in these behaviors, and such is the lure of discipline" (Trethewey, p. 436). For example, many of the participants in this study indicated "sexual desirability or at least 'attractiveness,' is an aspect of professionalism that they savour and enjoy" (p. 444). Trethewey's analysis points to the complex intersections of pleasure and discipline within power/knowledge relations.

Lammers & Garcia (2009) explore the ways in which profession is communicated, embodied, and practiced in a veterinary clinic. Professionalism in this organizational context was used as a discursive tool for organizational evolution and employee discipline. A key contribution of this work is a broader notion of discourse, which includes bodies, rituals, and symbols, beyond talk and text, which enable a fuller understanding of the dynamic tensions and negotiations bridging traditional analyses focused on micro/macro, structure/agency, and mind/body dichotomies. Building on how organizational studies employs discursive analyses, some research has put popular press Discourses of professionalism in conversation with micro-level enactments of professionalism (Holmer-Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000; Dempsey & Sanders, 2010).

Similarly, Cheney & Ashcraft (2007) make an important intervention in organizational studies research more broadly to argue professionalism is a discursive, political construction warranting additional attention and interdisciplinary research. Their research links professionalism to broader popular culture Discourses and illuminates the political, ambiguous, and pervasive nature of professionalism. In extending their conceptualization of professionalism, I have written about the colonization of professionalism into non-occupational domains using Foucault's concept of episteme (Adams, 2012). The discursive plurality of professionalism in the 21st century is demonstrated through emerging articulations of professionalism related to ideology, popular culture, the economy, and family. One effect of these articulations is that professionalism, while discursively contingent and varied, can privilege certain problematic subjectivities. The professionalism episteme engenders five professional subjectivities: the commodified professional, the embodied professional, the performative professional, the for-profit professional, and the archived professional (Adams, 2012). The problematic posed by these subjectivities rests in the limits posed for truly democratic organization, interaction, and collaboration. My work in this project adds a positive twist to my former work by foregrounding the positive capacity for affect within the potentially subjugating effects of the professionalism episteme within power/knowledge relations.

Lastly, some strands of organizational communication research have taken an interdisciplinary approach to challenging the politics behind discursive constructions of the sometimes seemingly fixed category of occupational identity. For Cheney, Lair, Ritz & Kendall (2010), “professionalism can compartmentalize rather than extend ethical practice, essentialize ‘quality’ in certain persons and groups (even in images of what the professional ought to look like), and alienate some classes in society from others” (p. 125). Ashcraft’s large volume of pioneering research (e.g., 2005, 2007, 2011) on airline pilots provides rich insights into the gendered dynamics of occupational identity construction, negotiation, and contestation. For Ashcraft (2007), occupational identity “is an ongoing rhetorical endeavor—occurring across time and space, across macro- and micro-messages, across institutions and actors, and in response to lived exigences and material possibilities—that functions to organize job segregation in large part by marshalling discourses of difference” (p. 10). Occupational identity is a discursive construction—constantly in process.

Yet, there is the sense in Ashcraft’s work that professional identities can be achieved (although it requires constant attention and work.) My study of the becomings of professional management consultants thus takes a divergent position in understanding identity work—life as a work of art; never finished, never achieved, only action upon action. Rather than viewing professionalism as an essentialized, embodied attribute for occupational identity, I take professionalism as an action. My work on professions and attendant professionalism technologies in this project focus on the positive, productive capacities of power-full bodies (both individual and collective) for affect. In this sense, function (action) takes precedence over attribute (identity).

The study of professions and professionalism in organizational communication research is relatively new. "Despite renewed attention to *profession*, the concept has not been explicated in organizational communication terms, nor has it been an explicit focus of organizational communication research" (Lammers & Garcia, 2009, p. 358, emphasis in original). While adding important insights to sociological and management studies of professions, organizational communication research about "being professional" remains tied to notions of work and organizational/occupational interests, despite the boundary-defying and world-making potential of discursive analyses. This project contributes to extant academic scholarship an understanding of the organizing work of the professionalism episteme within a broader project of self. Professional services work has at its core a method oriented to an Other. A discursive approach is productive to studying the management consulting industry as it examines the method of interaction informing the line of work and the potential for positive action and creative human flourishing.

Popular Press and Practitioner Texts

In addition to studying the academic research literature, it is important for researchers to analyze popular press literature because its characterizations of contemporary work and identity shape understandings of what it means to be professional (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010; Harney, 2007; Holmer-Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000). Generally speaking, popular management "self-help style" texts position professionalism as an attitude (Maister, 1999) that can be commodified and marketed to sell one's self and business. More specifically, in our current economy, being professional is about harnessing the power of creative knowledge (Florida, 2002; Gladwell, 2005; Peters, 2003; Pink, 2006).

Pink (2006) argues that the resulting automation of technological innovation "has placed a premium on less rational, more R-Directed [right-brain] sensibilities—beauty, spirituality, emotion" (p. 33). In re-imagining the organizational workplace, Pink identifies six abilities critical to professional success: design, story, synthesis, empathy, play, and meaning (pp. 65-67). Successful professionals in contemporary society will "master different aptitudes, relying more on creativity than competence, more on tacit knowledge than technical manuals, and more on fashioning the big picture than sweating the details" (pp. 44-45). This reconstruction of professional capability from bureaucratic rationality is also gleaned from Zander & Zander's (2000) text on professional transformational practices. The authors muse:

> Suppose for a moment that vital, expressive energy flows everywhere, that it is the medium for the existence of life, and that any block to participating in that vitality lies within ourselves. Of course, our minds tell us a different story. (Zander & Zander, p. 113)

In order to move beyond self-imposed perceptual constraints, the authors outline several practices designed to stimulate personal positivity, potential for influence, and a mindset grounded in the "art of possibility." Again, there is a sense in this text that an ethos of creativity and passion is essential for the successful contemporary professional. Indeed, executive team members at one corporation received Zander & Zander's text as a gift from their management consulting firm.

In the case of the management consulting industry, popular press texts provide anticipatory socialization for working as a consultant, hiring a consultant, and/or applying consulting logics to one's own division/work group/company. Discussing the current state of business affairs and how to maximize one's success as a consultant are a host of current and former management consultants (Friga, 2009; Hamel, 2007; Maister, 1997; Peters & Waterman, 2006; Rasiel, 1999). As Dempsey and Sanders (2010) argue, “popular culture reflects and reproduces cultural expectations about work and professional life and serves as a potential resource for organizational members” (p. 441). Friga’s (2009) work, for example, provides a management consulting engagement toolkit of best practices, based upon his (and other consultants’) research and experience in the management consulting industry. Rather than focusing on such techniques and analytical tools, Maister (1997) focuses on the attributes, attitudes, values, and professional comportments necessary for successful client-consultant partnerships. Although different in approach, both Friga and Maister provide recommendations for developing and sustaining successful management consulting practices.

In addition to handbook-like texts for management consulting success, investigative reports inform perceptions of the management consulting industry. For example, McKinsey and Deloitte made the news recently with charges of former employees engaging in insider trading practices. McKinsey’s former CEO, Rajat Gupta, was found guilty of leaking information about Goldman Sachs to a hedge fund manager (Lattman & Ahmed, 2012). Also in 2012, Huron Consulting settled a United States Securities and Exchange Commission investigation by agreeing to pay a $1 million fine. The firm, established by former Arthur Andersen partners, was charged with misrepresenting the profitability of four business acquisitions in accounting statements (Stempel, 2012). Reporting on the sensational and cataclysmic effects of consulting scandals influences the credibility of the industry (Kiechel, 2010; O’Shea & Madigan, 1998). I hope this research study balances out some of these sensational reports of consulting dramas through the portrayals I have offered thus far regarding the everyday, positive, and productive work of consultants.

But, at the same time, these popular press accounts signal ruptures through which the invisible hand of management consulting influence in global corporate operations and strategy become visible. This is also where inter-firm dynamics become visible. For example, the Enron scandal took down an entire firm, Arthur Andersen. But, McKinsey and Company's role was overshadowed. "More attention was lavished on Andersen's inability to oversee Enron's financial statements than was spent on McKinsey's crucial role in corporate governance" (McKenna, 2006, p. 218). McKinsey emerged from the scandal relatively unscathed and Congress passed the Sarbanes-Oxley Corporate Reform Act, which prevents accounting firms from offering consulting services to companies they audit. Thus, popular press and practitioner texts can offer important "insider" information about the industry and nature of consulting work that is difficult for academic researchers to gain access to due a variety of reasons, including strategy firm secrecy and university IRB protocols.

All of these perspectives overlap as intersecting articulations of professionalism, with implications for how to approach management consulting professionalism from a more macro-lens. These varied disciplinary accounts are important to understanding the combined social, political, and discursive constitution of professionalism. Across all disciplinary contexts, research on professionalism and professions has struggled to make sense of who can make claims to particular forms of expertise, with implications for how work is divided, performed, and controlled.

Professional Boundaries

What, then, are the implications for studying the becoming processes of professional management consultants? In this section, I articulate a definition of professions and reflect upon extant academic literature to determine whether or not the classification of management consulting as a profession is a difference that makes a difference in understanding its collective potential. This discussion will provide context for *both* the collective dynamic informing consultant identity work (Chapter Four) *and* theorizing the potential of occupations as methods (Chapter Five).

Scholars continue to be interested in defining whether or not management consulting is a profession (Greiner & Poulfelt, 2005; McKenna, 2006; Muzio, Kirkpatrick, & Kipping, 2011). Combining the work of sociology, management studies, and organizational communication, I consider professions as discursively articulated effects of various power/knowledge articulations that attempt to sediment through competitive practices a set of ethics, disciplinary techniques, labor markets, specialized knowledge, and organizing practices, recognized symbolically and/or materially. From this conceptualization, the answer to whether or not management consulting is a profession is complicated.

On the one hand, the professionalization of managerialism and corresponding "proletarianization" of professional work (Leicht & Fennell, 2001) legitimizes management consulting work as a domain of expertise from which professionalized managers can draw upon for business "truths." If legitimate professions are those that achieve "diffuse legitimacy" over crafting and executing organizational strategies and tactics (Brint, 1994; Muzio & Kirkpatrick, 2011), then management consulting fits the bill. Under claims of "client confidentiality," management consulting firms control access to valuable industry information—blending and mixing client information into matrices, best practices, models, competitive strategies, and technology codes. This creates a barrier to entry for other occupations seeking to provide business expertise to the growing number of international corporations. It is difficult to compete with the prestige and expertise of traditional management consulting firms if it is unclear what exactly and how exactly they do what they do.

Additionally, strategy consulting firms retain a preferred labor market: business schools and other consulting firms. Smaller, specialized firms draw upon the training, socialization, and prestige of consultant experiences at larger firms in recruiting practices and selling work to clients. For example, proposals will often reference consultants' work histories at "big-name" consulting firms. At the same time, these firms distinguish themselves from the larger firms in recruiting practices by drawing upon discourses of better work-life balance and regional focus (i.e., reduced travel).

But, on the other hand, "while management consultants have grown as an occupation, extending their influence at all levels of business and public sector decision-making, like other knowledge-based occupations they appear to have side-stepped conventional models of professionalization" (Muzio, Kirkpatrick & Kipping, 2011, p. 806). If we put together the various disciplinary constructions of professionalism between sociology, management studies, organizational communication, and popular press depictions, then management consulting is certainly a defined occupational domain, but is not a profession.

From a sociological perspective, the commercial logic of these firms are privileged over social trusteeship logic (Muzio & Kirkpatrick, 2011), which raises questions about objectivity and ethics. Management consulting work is relational and co-constructed with clients, unlike the "objective," detached knowledge of traditional professional work, like that of doctors. The business knowledge in which consultants traffic is not fixed—it is contextual, dispersed, historical, and dependent upon client input. As such, there are no standards for credentialing or expectations of association membership—to ensure a code of ethics benefiting the client rather than profits. Without mandatory certification, licensing, and/or educational requirements, the result is that "just about anyone these days can declare themselves to be a 'management consultant;' and they can even advertise themselves in the yellow pages as a 'business consultant' (Greiner & Ennsfellner, 2009, p. 73).

From a management studies perspective, management consulting work is ambiguous and perishable, making it difficult to codify and archive. Additionally, management consulting is a fragmented business with different specializations (e.g., traditional business strategy, IT, outsourcing, market research, human resources)—making it difficult to define and optimize boundaries between firms. Regulatory restrictions often help form boundaries, but there is an interesting interrelationship between the management consulting industry and the state, as the state functions as both a regulator and a consumer of consulting services (McKenna, 2001). Largely, the state relies upon the industry to self-regulate—perhaps a function of "new governmental priorities connected with the rediscovery of a neoliberal agenda, and weakening support for values of social trusteeship" (Muzio, et al., 2011, p. 814). Lastly, established strategy firms have been successful in campaigning against state licensing initiatives (McKenna, 2001)—perhaps because the professionalization project might transform business expertise from a marketable asset to a public good (Muzio, et al., 2011).

The professionalization of the management consulting industry is also unlikely given the nature of contemporary work. While the professionalization of managerialism can set up management consultants as providers of expertise, it could also "proletarianize" (Leicht & Fennell, 2001) the professionalism of management consulting work. As consultants are increasingly used as outsourced employees for long-term engagements and the project-nature of corporate work is increasing, management consultants may see a reduction of autonomy and an increased dependency on organization-specific objectives thereby weakening their own occupational prestige (familiarity breeds contempt?) and expertise (longer-term engagements mean fewer clients from which to aggregate industry knowledge).

From an organizational communication perspective, professions are a discursive effect of certain truth claims as to what counts as legitimate knowledge, bodies, and sense-making practices. Therefore, categorizing work and organizing practices as a static, bounded form is problematic because it sediments and naturalizes. Treating professions and professionalism as sedimented categories masks the discursive, and therefore contingent, construction of these concepts within strategic power relations. Although it is clear that D/discourse is constitutive and generative of material and symbolic representations and effects, the question asks for a value judgment about whether or not the industry has succeeded in sedimenting knowledge claims to truth, expertise, and power within the broader economy. The question becomes less about whether or not management consulting is a profession within privileged definitions (with various vested interests) and more about conditions of possibility.

Summary

This research study on management consulting professionalism makes an important intervention into discussions of professions and attendant constructions of professionalism and professional identities, as it explores the ways in which professionalism performs the organizing work of crafting management consultant understandings of self. Instead of asking how we know occupational work through the communication of difference and identity, I am interested in how we become selves through the communicative work of professionalism. To reiterate, I use the word “become” not as an achievement, but as a continual process of choices. “Becoming” in a

Foucauldian sense entails a constant attention and evaluation of what counts as truth claims—it is continual work without a linear teleology.

Given consultant involvement in gathering and interpreting data sets, making and negotiating strategic business decisions, advising C-suite executives at multi-national corporations, and building social network capital, the management consulting industry maintains significant influence in global business operations. Consultants, as an occupational collective, hold great promise and *potentia* (or, capacity) to affect change. From consultant descriptions of work tasks and types of client relationships and the industry's reputation within broader Discourses of occupational prestige and influence, the power/knowledge dynamics at play in this line of work are made visible.

Through the descriptions in this chapter, I have portrayed a particular landscape upon which the becoming processes of professional management consultants operate. Through the industry background presented, accounts of day-to-day work, and a review of academic and popular press texts, I have provided background on what management consulting work "looks" and "feels" like. This micro-level description makes a significant contribution to professional services firm research, as studies with top-tier management consultants are relatively rare.

This chapter has taken a practical, applied, and concrete examination of the "sweat" of management consulting work and the principles/practices influencing the formation of management consulting as an occupational collective. The next chapter shifts gears and explicates the philosophical principles informing my project's approach in more detail. Although complex and abstract, theories of power/knowledge and the professionalism episteme are important to understanding the constructions of self discussed in further detail in Chapter Four. In the following chapter, I use examples from extant organizational studies to demonstrate how power/knowledge relations and self-disciplining contribute to a framework of “life as a work of art.” Additionally, I use examples from consultant interviews to further explicate the material effects of power/knowledge relations in concrete terms.

III. Becoming: Power, Knowledge, and the Professional Self

"From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art"

(Foucault, 1994)

As previewed in Chapter One, the core of this project relates to an exploration of the becoming activities of professional management consultants. Thus far, I have provided a brief overview of the theoretical perspectives informing my approach and outlined a sketch of what management consulting work looks like. It is now time to describe in more detail the canvas upon which this emerging portrait rests. The colors and brush strokes will be added in Chapter Four through a more careful analysis of management consultant activities related to Foucault's aesthetic dimensions of self construction. "Life as a work of art" welcomes the affective potential of *both* rationality *and* passion as currents shaping becoming processes of self within a field of power/knowledge relations.

The notion of life as a work of art predates modern civilization. In the early days, love, God, miracles, and the sacred were woven into the everyday. The Age of Enlightenment brought rationality, order, and logic. This shifted worldviews tolerant of cosmological mystery and uncertainty with reason—an assumption that the everyday held meaning and structure, if only the scientific mind could unearth it. For many years, humans have defined, classified, tested, and constructed the world around specific human orderings and interpretations of experience. Yet, contemporary writings, as mentioned in the preface, suggest a gross dissatisfaction with this perspective. As our world is socially, discursively, and politically constructed, the nature of the world can only be "known" in a distorted manner, and as mediated by discursive (yet, often materially sedimented) effects. What we know about the world, suggests Michel Foucault, is only a construction of constructions.

This chapter examines the underlying assumptions about power, knowledge, and self embedded in a "life as a work of art" framework. The first part of this chapter offers a detailed accounting of philosophical principles from Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Foucault. Although lengthy and abstract, I feel it is important to share how I have bridged together elements from these theorists' works so that readers can gain insight into the ways in which I have designed and executed this project. Additionally, these concepts inform how professionalism as an organizing technology (episteme) operates in power/knowledge relations. But, bear with me because the second half of this chapter turns to how contemporary research on theories of power, knowledge, and self have been applied to corporate contexts. At that point, I also offer concrete examples from my management consultant interviews as illustrative effects of the organizing work of the professionalism episteme (Adams, 2012) within power/knowledge relations.

The "Life as a Work of Art" Ontological Canvas

Michel Foucault was a mid-20th century philosopher and historian who is well-known for his contributions to discourse, power, knowledge, and subjectivity. In many ways, his work bridges early philosophy about human ontology and epistemology with historical insights into power/knowledge relations within contemporary society. Power, in a Foucauldian sense, is dispersed. Rather than looking at power from a viewpoint of the rights, designs, and tools of a central authority, or sovereign power, Foucault (1980) disrupts this unidirectional construction by positioning power as a productive, strategic relation of truth and knowledge claims that “invests itself in institutions, becomes embodied in techniques, and equips itself with instruments” (p. 96). Deleuze (1988a) describes Foucault’s conceptualization of power as distinctly Nietzschean: “power is not essentially repressive […] it is practiced before it is possessed […] it passes through the hands of the mastered no less than through the hands of the masters” (p. 71). It is a productive relationship of actions. “The power to be affected is like a *matter* of force, and the power to affect is like a *function* of force” (Deleuze, pp. 71-72, emphasis in original). Foucault’s analysis of prisons, mental institutions, and the history of sexuality gradually develop the complexities of power/knowledge relations from a traditional notion of sovereign power to the imposing functions of discursive regimes of truth to an entrepreneurial self-disciplining of the neoliberal subject.

Foucault’s use of power as a strategic relation of forces warrants further explication. The matter and function of force of Deleuze’s description of Foucauldian power has its roots in Spinoza’s early theories of the world. Spinoza (1996) delineates forces as actions and passions. “*Actions*, which are explained by the nature of the affected individual, and which spring from the individual’s essence; and *passions*, which are explained by something else, and which originate outside the individual” (Deleuze, 1988b, p. 27, emphasis in original). Passions, those forces originating outside of us, shift our attention from action (affecting) to feeling (being affected). The way this works is:

> The power of acting varies according to external causes for the same capacity for being affected. The feeling affect (joy or sadness) follows from the image affection or idea that it presupposes (the idea of the body that agrees with ours or does not agree); and when the affect comes back upon the idea from which it follows, the joy becomes *love*, and the sadness, *hatred*. In this way the different series of affections and affects continually fulfill, but under variable conditions, the capacity for being affected. (Deleuze, 1988b, p. 50, emphasis in original)

Given this framework of bodies and forces as strategic power relations, resistance is about control of the self—resistance to excesses of pleasure/power/knowledge dynamics or as an interiorization of active, power (position of *ressentiment*) or guilt (bad consciousness) (Nietzsche, 1969). Either way, resistance doesn't make sense using this theorization of power if we all share a Spinozan power capacity (similar to Foucault's fluid nodes and networks conceptualization) as part of the playing field upon which we all exist:

> One cannot over emphasize the extent to which the notions of struggle, war, rivalry, or even comparison are foreign to Nietzsche and to his conception of the will to power. It is not that he denies the existence of struggle: but he does not see it as in any way creative of values. At least, the only values that it creates are those of the triumphant slave. Struggle is not the principle or the motor of hierarchy but the means by which the slave reverses hierarchy. Struggle is never the active expression of forces, nor the manifestation of a will to power that affirms—any more than its result expresses the triumph of the master or the strong. Struggle, on the contrary, is the means by which the weak prevail over the strong, because they are the greatest number. (Deleuze, 2006, p. 82)

Resistance in this conceptualization is either misattribution or reaction. Resistance suggests a perceived "lack" in the face of the achieved power of an Other (a slave mentality, for Nietzsche). As such, resistance contributes to a forgetting that strategic relations that diminish life force are characteristic of the weak, rather than the strong. Strength that does not promote human flourishing and power in Others is not strength at all. It is weakness. Alternatively, resistance can cast the recipient, or victim, of power relations as reactionary. However, internalizing an Other's action as part of one's identity runs the risk of brewing *ressentiment* or bad consciousness (guilt). In this way, the weak "win" by dragging down the very life force holding the *potentia* and capacity for joy, love, and positivity. For Nietzsche (1966, 1969), forgiveness is the only way to prevent the denigrating affects of reaction. Through forgiveness, the "reaction" is transformed into "action." This is a feat only possible in "the strong," as it requires a great deal of courage to meet the Other as an equal—neither reducing one's self nor the Other through moralized judgments of attribute/identity.

A human ethic, or substance, from this perspective is less about particular values or behaviors constituting a type of morality (in our contemporary culture this is predominantly associated with Christianity—i.e., "being Christian") and more about a will to power (discussed in further detail in Chapter six). It seems that Foucault, Nietzsche, and Spinoza are arguing for a conceptualization of humanness that is, fundamentally, unknowable and impossible to judge because the world as we think we know it is a construction of a construction through the mutually constitutive relationship of power/knowledge. As any conception of self is always inextricably bound within the power/knowledge relationship, we cannot extricate a human essence outside of the representational practices and symbols of the world and our communicative interactions. Subjectivity is the term given to this mediating lens of our own identity(ies).

Power relations mobilize knowledge and are inherent to truth claims. Foucault (1997) describes the ways in which we identify knowledge in the following manner:

> It characterizes, groups together, and coordinates a set of practices and institutions; it is the constantly shifting locus of the constitution of sciences; it is the constituent element of a complex causality in which the history of science is caught up. (p. 9)

Knowledge formalizes matter and function into that which is seeable and sayable (Deleuze, 1988a). This plane of knowledge—that which is rendered conscious to us by the interactions of various forces—represents the "visual and the articulable" (Deleuze, p. 83). It is the discursive and political practices of how we manufacture knowledge that is of interest to Foucault.

One effect of these power/knowledge relations is the self. In a seductive blend of subjectivity and governmentality, the emergence of an economy of caring for one's self (a “technology of the self”) leads to an ethic of self that includes: “reflection on modes of living, on choices of existence, on the way to regulate one’s behavior, to attach oneself to ends and means” (Foucault, 1997, p. 89). These are the techniques people use to make sense of themselves and understand their relations to Others.

Although Foucault (1980) states “the problem is not changing people’s consciousness—or what’s in their heads—but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth” (p. 133), his body of work still retains an inevitable modernist project of enlightenment. It is precisely the claim that consciousness (that which we think we know) is a reflection of the mutually constitutive interplays of power and knowledge dynamics (*both* material *and* symbolic) that necessitates increased awareness of the implications for contemporary life and work.

Stuart Hampshire’s summary of Spinoza’s (1996) human ontology is important for understanding *both* an ethic of self *and* the social:

> Every individual thing, and consequently every individual person, strives to preserve and to increase his or her individuality, against the threat of being overcome and absorbed by external forces. The drive to self-assertion, and to an aggressive sense of my own power and distinctiveness as a person, is always present, and some of this sense of unity and this aggressiveness is transferred to communities of persons. Nothing is more useful to a person, [Spinoza] claims, than the added strength that comes from the union with other persons in a community, which then becomes itself an individual thing, with its own drive to self-preservation. (p. xiii)

Consciousness is less about knowledge of divine truths, and more about thought processes (Deleuze, 1988b). As an early adopter of the collapse of mind/body distinctions, Spinoza argues, “the body surpasses the knowledge we have of it, *and that thought likewise surpasses the consciousness that we have of it*” (Deleuze, p. 18, emphasis in original). Keep in mind that a body can be an individual’s physical body, but can also be a non-living body, a body in nature, and/or a collective body. “When a body ‘encounters’ another body, or an idea another idea, it happens that the two relations sometimes combine to form a more powerful whole, and sometimes one decomposes the other, destroying the cohesion of its parts" (Deleuze, p. 19). But, like Foucault, Spinoza says we only aware of the *effects* of these interactions—the manifestations of power/knowledge relations.

Spinozan morality, as a precursor to Nietzsche's philosophy, involves only that which is good and bad for a body (individual or collective):

> The good is when a body directly compounds its relation with ours, and, with all or part of its power, increases ours. A food, for example. For us, the bad is when a body decomposes our body's relation, although it still combines with our parts, but in ways that do not correspond to our essence, as when a poison breaks down the blood. (Deleuze, 1988b, p. 22)

Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Foucault all share a methodological commitment to an ethic, as a qualitative mode of active existence, rather than a morality based in value judgments.

In summary, the work of Foucault, Nietzsche, and Spinoza inform the conceptual toolkit I employ for analyzing the becoming activities of professional management consultants. Theorists have described power in various ways: strategic relations (Foucault, 1977, 1980, 1997), matter-substance (Deleuze, 1988a), God—form of man (Tolle, 2005), and God—formless Nature/Oneness (Spinoza, 1996). But, they all share the assumption that power is a presupposing *potentia* that is in all (discursive and non-discursive, human and non-human). These philosophers also agree that it is the mutually constitutive nature of power/knowledge that creates what is "knowable," seeable, and sayable. How does power create knowledge and what do we do with that magnanimous *potentia* for affecting and being affected in our world?

Not generally known for our tolerance for ambiguity or chaos, humans make sense of the world through interactions and actions that mold the plane of power according to particular organizing frameworks. These organizing tools form a particular field of knowledge. One such tool is the episteme (Foucault, 1972, 1973). The episteme functions to bring together dispersed articulations of power/knowledge relations. This is organizing work, but I use the phrase "bringing together" here to highlight that the process is neither linear nor inherently logical. In one interview, Foucault (1980) describes the episteme as a particular kind of discursive apparatus:

> I said that the apparatus is essentially of a strategic nature, which means assuming that it is a matter of a certain manipulation of forces, either developing them in a particular direction, blocking them, stabilizing them, utilizing them, etc. The apparatus is thus always inscribed in a play of power, but it is also always linked to certain coordinates of knowledge which issue from it but, to an equal degree, condition it. This is what the apparatus consists in: strategies of relations of forces [power] supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge. (p. 196)

The episteme is an organizing technology of power/knowledge relations. Although multiple epistemes operate and overlap with each other in any given epoch, for the purposes of this project I focus on the professionalism episteme (Adams, 2012).

The professionalism episteme erects different ways of experiencing life. The mechanics of how this operates involves an interpretation, molding, and evaluation of the relations of forces (power) into the material ways we know, see, and can say things about the world around us (knowledge). What is seeable, sayable, and knowable is inextricable from the underlying, shared power/capacity to affect and be affected through both active and reactive forces. For illustrative purposes only, please refer to **Appendix C: An Episteme: The Organizing Work of Power/Knowledge**. In this illustration, the professionalism episteme draws up capacities to affect and be affected through currents of rationality and passion. Knowledge is an effect of these intersections—some of which is conscious, some of which is unconscious. Knowledge acts in a recursive fashion, as the droplets feed back into the power base, thus once again interacting with the currents of rationality and passion and informing power/knowledge effects. I see this as a discursive process, although the effects may become materialized and sedimented over time. This does not undermine the discursive origin of power/knowledge effects, thus sustaining the *potentia* of affecting change. Or, in other words, what we think we know/create remains a manifestation of human power/knowledge constructions. Thus, “reality,” however material and concrete, is a construction of discursive interaction/articulation. As discussed in the preface, there is no truth or reality outside of these socially constructed power/knowledge effects.

The professionalism episteme produces particular effects, or knowledge claims. For example, as previously discussed, effects of the professionalism episteme include various professional subjectivities. These constructions of self are *both* a product *and* an ingredient in articulations of power/knowledge. Consider the professional social networking site, LinkedIn. The existence of such a medium for the marketing and promotion of professional selves is an articulation of power/knowledge organized by the commodified professional (Adams, 2012) of the professionalism episteme.

Professionalism, as an organizing technology, is *both* an architect *and* conduit for power/knowledge relations, as we will see in more detail in the next chapter. Given strategic power relations, we can analyze management consulting professionalism knowledge—the material sedimentation and discursive constructions of power relations—as *both* affirming *and* negating consultant potential for strength and positivity. We cannot identify an action as something that is either good or evil, but only whether or not the action increases our capacity to affect or diminishes it (Spinoza, 1996). Understanding the organizing tools mediating the power/knowledge relationship facilitates a consciousness that the world necessarily is as it is because the organizing tools crafting such material and symbolic manifestations of knowledge manufacture but one kind of taken-for-granted reality.

Power/Knowledge and Organizational Studies

Foucault's work, as a provocative and controversial approach grounded in both Nietzschean and Spinozan theories, has developed a long-standing instrumental value to organizational analysis. This section looks at some of the foundational and often-cited organizational studies as exemplars of how power/knowledge relations manifest in organizational studies scholarship. This also includes an overview of the ways in which principles of Foucault's analyses have shaped approaches to studying the effects of power/knowledge in corporate settings, beginning with the case for discursive analysis.

The 1970s are heralded as a landmark time period for organization studies. First, the linguistic turn represented a philosophical shift in understanding the socially constructed nature of the world. More than a conceptual reframing of communication from object of analysis to producer, the linguistic turn can be "understood as shorthand for a whole continental philosophical tradition that attempts to transcend the subject-object dualism that undergirds much of modernist knowledge production, and that has its origins in a psychological conception of experience of a world that exists independently from this experience" (Mumby, 2011, p. 1148). One effect of this tradition was a disruption in the taken-for-granted view of communication as a mediator between an autonomous subject and an external object. Communication does not simply transmit concepts or connect people, communication is generative and constitutive—it is world-making.

Secondly, the 1970s marked a turn in the nature of work from an emphasis on industrial production to knowledge-service work—thus signaling the rise of the modern corporation as "the central form of working relations and as the dominant institution in society" (Deetz, 1992, p. 2). Researchers shifted their analytical gaze from factories to offices. The knowledge work associated with a service-oriented economy can be characterized by work processes centered on self-management, task ambiguity (thereby requiring communication), client/customer-centric relationships, and strong professional norms (Deetz, 1998). The change in organizing context and work processes (combined with new conceptual resources emerging out of the linguistic turn) offered organizational scholars new ways to theorize discourse, power, and identity.

These changes in the world opened up new opportunities for rethinking processes of organizing that were taken for granted previously. Critical approaches to organizational studies emerged during this time period as a theoretical approach for identifying and critiquing the politics of everyday organizational life. Fournier and Grey (2000) argue that three of the defining characteristics of critical organization study include: an approach to management that does not privilege performance or efficiency; a questioning of naturalized organizing processes and power relations; and a commitment to philosophical and methodological reflexivity (Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips, 2006, pp. 281-282). Critical organizational studies often take the perspective of the employee (why do employees work as hard as they do?), as opposed to traditional management studies, which tend to favor management perspectives (how can we get employees to work more efficiently/productively?). For critical organizational researchers, there is an underlying interest in making work relationships, structures, and processes better for people.

Yet, critical organizational studies is an umbrella term for a vast array of scholarship with assorted epistemological and ontological commitments. Representing diverse theoretical frameworks (e.g., critical modernist, post-colonial, feminist post-structuralism, postmodern—see Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Knights, 2009; Mumby, 1997 for various overviews), critical scholars, broadly speaking, perform three tasks as organizational investigators: to provide insight, critique, and transformative redefinition (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000, p. 17). Critical organizational studies involves "challenging rather than confirming that which is established, disrupting rather than reproducing cultural traditions and conventions, opening up and showing tensions in language use rather than continuing its domination, encouraging productive dissension rather than taking surface consensus as a point of departure" (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000, p. 9). Thus, there is an underlying emancipatory aim in critical research that assumes some form of repressive antagonism from which awareness, autonomy, resistance, and/or doing differently in work contexts would change/ameliorate the conditions and/or essence of being human.

The following sections illustrate some of the ways in which discourse, power, and various power/knowledge effects shape what we think we know about organizing practices and constructions of self at work. As a complement to extant research on various power/knowledge effects, I use exemplars from professional management consultant experiences at the end of each section to further demonstrate the organizing work of the professionalism episteme.

Discourse

Discourse is theorized in a number of ways and often used interchangeably with language, text, and communication. As mentioned, the linguistic turn was a philosophical rupture in understanding and theorizing how humans make sense of the world. As such, communication takes center stage as world-making—disrupting one-dimension views of communication as a tool or medium for information exchange. However, there has been debate over whether or not the generative and constitutive nature of communication runs the risk of being theorized as ideological (see Grossberg, 1982) or that the theoretical conflation between the use of Discourse versus discourse renders analyses problematic and/or moot (Alvesson &

Ka□rreman, 2011a, 2011b). Generally, discourse (little “d”) is seen as situated talk and text, while Discourse (big “D”) is used for broader social constructions of social reality (Alvesson & Ka□rreman, 2000). But, importantly, “discourses and Discourses function in a reciprocal, dialectical manner” (Mumby & Mease, 2011, p. 284) from which meanings are socially constructed, not formed inside autonomous human minds (Mumby, 2011). Language, in this sense, is part of the discursive field through which meanings, bodies, identities, etc. are made possible.

For structuralist linguistics, following Saussure, there is no necessary relationship between a signifier (sound or image) and the signified (concept)—it is arbitrary. But, when these two elements are taken together as a sign, the meaning is fixed. The meaning is fixed within a system of relations just by its very nature of being different from other signs. Thus, “cat” is meaningful only in its difference from the sign “Cate.” This view of language does not account for the politics inherent to language. The work of Ashcraft (2007), Weedon (1997), and other post-structuralist feminist approaches argues that the politics of language is predicated upon the contingency of signs, as meanings shift across time and context. Weedon (1997) explains that the structure of Saussure’s language system “cannot explain why the signifier ‘woman’ can have many conflicting meanings which change over time” (p. 24). Representation (a fixed sign) masks the power relations and discursive context within which the sign is constituted (Weedon, 1997). The politics of language is about struggles to stabilize meaning.

From a Foucauldian perspective, discourse does not mean linguistic signification. Foucault is looking at language in the broadest sense possible, as producing other effects. Foucauldian analysis is not about interpretation or processes of meaning production. He is interested in the kinds of effects that are produced within D/discourses beyond signifying activities. Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) deploy a Foucauldian conceptualization of discourse in their research on the political ambiguity of professionalism, which reflects:

> A return to the more robust notion of discourse advanced by Foucault, which allows for the consideration of bodies, adornments, and architecture (among other things) within the range of associations and manifestations of discourse as an arena of knowledge, interaction, and control. At this broad level, discourse refers to assemblages, contexts, and movements of symbols and artifacts that come to cohere around a certain defining idea, principle, or relationship. (p. 157)

A discursive approach to organizational studies showcases the socially and symbolically constructed nature of organizational life and relationships—thus, keeping open the possibility of doing, knowing, and becoming otherwise in an otherwise determining plane of power/knowledge relations informing our sense of self in relation to Others (including the discursive, material, and the human). Discourse is an effect—a manifestation—of power/knowledge relations. For example, discourse within a field of power/knowledge possibilities affects organizing forms and information technologies:

Knowledge effect: Organizing form.

Organizations are political, social, and historical "sites" of contestation and negotiation between individuals and groups seeking to sustain both implicit and explicit interests (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Deetz, 2001). The linguistic turn eventually contributed to a conceptual shift from organizations as sites/containers for communication ("communication in organizations") to the communicative constitution of organizing practices ("organization in communication") (Taylor, 2011, pp. 1275-1276). Talking about "organizing" rather than "organizations" reflects the interactive and transactional foundations of communication in material manifestations, such as the legal entity form of an organization. As such, the structure-agency debate is reframed. As traditionally conceptualized, structure "connotes fixity, permanence, rigidity, while an organizational communication view, almost by definition, connotes action, movement, uncertainty" (Taylor, p. 1289). Taking "organizations as discursive constructions"—whether as objects, in the process of becoming, or as grounded in action showcases the recursive nature of varied articulations of discourse, power, change, and identity, which shape organizing forms, processes, and actors (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004).

From a management consulting perspective, the discursive construction of professionalism impacts consulting organizing formations. For example, one consultant discussed the importance of mentoring because it enables "people who have been in the profession for a long time to counsel the new staff on how to navigate difficult situations." This is accomplished not only through talk and organizational texts, but also through emulated bodily comportments and emotional control. Secondarily, another consultant executive remarked that "everything is done in teams" in management consulting. As an example of this observation, the consultant described the ways in which partners, colleagues, and junior team members rallied together in support of the consultant's professional development and subsequent promotion to partner.

Knowledge effect: Information technologies.

Discourse provides anticipatory work socialization for people in a number of ways. First, everyday talk creates expectations about what is considered legitimate work (Clair, 1996). Discourses about skill shape social values of some occupations, while simultaneously degrading others. Secondly, educational institutions also provide information about work tasks and roles (Jablin, 2001) and produce particular subjectivities, such as the channeling of working class boys into factory work in Willis' (1977) research.

Lastly, as a "self technology," governing oneself involves "the procedures, which no doubt exist in every civilization, suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends, through relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge" (Foucault, 1997, p. 87). Critical organizational studies have examined this phenomenon through personality testing (Holmer-Nadesan, 1997; Townley, 1993). But, discourse, identity and power relations are also bound in such recruiting technologies as resumes and social networking sites. These confessional technologies assist in the discursive construction of potential employees prior to starting a position. Some companies rely heavily on employee referrals, thus reinforcing homophily within the social body. Resumes as a text construct a particular kind of employee and strategically present candidate knowledge and experience through a strategically crafted lens. Social media networking sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, market a candidate's social capital and indicate whether or not the person's connections are for business or pleasure, or both. LinkedIn enables users to craft marketable selves at the click of a button by asking other connections for recommendations of their work, thus contributing to additional self-knowledge, a strategically archived subjectivity, and perhaps an extension of their social network.

One consultant pointed to the importance of networking in crafting professional identity: "Networking is the lifeblood of any management consultant because you have to execute and leverage yourself and then you can go out and find new business." Although the self-promotion can be pleasurable and seductive in terms of personal branding and positive feedback from colleagues and clients, social networking is also difficult. As one consulting executive noted, "it is difficult for folks to go from working at desk jobs, doing spreadsheet analysis, to then turning around and talking about themselves and self promoting themselves." One of my responsibilities at Campbell Alliance was to ensure my professional profile (a summary of my skills and experience on a PowerPoint slide) remained up to date for use in firm marketing presentations.

Power

Power is a central element of analysis in critical organization studies. Although there are varied theoretical dimensions of power that overlap and blend with each other (see Mumby, 2001), I focus in this section on the conceptualizations most often cited in critical organizational studies research. Generally, critical organizational research tends to mark the development of five types of control. Edwards (1979) laid the foundations for the first three: direct ("hired hands"), technological (bodies as machine extensions), and bureaucratic (routinization). The fourth type of control, cultural-ideological (Alvesson, 1994), marks a shift in control processes demanding coercion to those control processes facilitating consent.

Stemming from various movements in the 1960s to 1980s *both* to treat workers as "human resources" requiring "human relations" *and* provide meaningful, inclusive corporate cultures, cultural-ideological control began to reflect the changing nature of the employment relationship. This marked the beginnings of a new corporate philosophy—from what the company can do for employees to what employees can do for themselves:

> Instead of rules, standardization of work procedures, direct supervision, and other means of control targeted at employee behavior, indirect forms of influence targeted at values and norms in the workplace, the development of a common spirit among all personnel irrespective of rank, efforts to knit employees closer to the company, use of specific verbal expressions, leadership behavior, and physical artifacts that communicate specific meanings are emphasized. (Alvesson, 1994, p. 3)

This kind of concertive, or normative, control also included a shift in the locus of control from the manager to self-directing, consensus-driven teams operating through implicit and explicit value-laden norms (Barker, 1993). The fifth type of control discussed in critical management studies is disciplinary. This type of control emerged from a Foucauldian perspective that power is productive (not repressive), dispersed (not top-down), and mutually constitutive of resistance, knowledge, and pleasure (not an independent, concentrated tool). In this framework, power is a strategic social relation rooted in consent, rather than domination (see also, Deetz, 1998; Knights, 2009). The conceptualizations of power I addressed at the beginning of this chapter offer the potential to extend the theoretical toolkit available to organizational scholars.

In early labor process theory, power is seen as negative and repressive. Sociological texts such as Burawoy (1979), Braverman (1974), and Edwards (1979) are foundational for historicizing the shift in labor processes, control, and resistance. From a Marxist perspective, power is a negative relation in the form of ideology that produces a false consciousness that hides the transformative potential of class revolution. So, in these studies, resistance is characterized by individual-level techniques of resistance, which has the effect of "adding fuel to the fire" of capitalist production. As such, the early factory ethnographic classics tend to privilege the body as an extension of the machine, rather than thinking about employees as productive agents of resistance. The oppressive conditions of capitalist production prohibit more transformative possibilities that could be realized through collective resistance.

Foucauldian studies of power and subjectivity disrupt the Marxist intervention, which positions people as human capital—cogs in the machine, as effects of state ideology. As previously mentioned at the start of this chapter, power from a Foucauldian perspective can be thought of as a strategic relation that is neither positive nor negative; it is simply productive and dispersed (there is no sovereign head). Foucault's (1980) difficulty with the Marxist conceptualization of ideology is that it "always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth" (p. 118). Relatedly, repression stands in for prohibition and negation, which "is quite inadequate for capturing what is precisely the productive aspect of power" (Foucault, p. 119). Foucault problematizes humanist conceptions of autonomous, rational humans and progressive, objective knowledge by excavating games of truth in history—the taken-for-granted systems of inclusion and exclusion shaping what counts as knowledge. This includes bodies and subjectivities.

For Foucault, subjects are products of various forms of knowledge and are either "subject to someone else's control […or…] tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 212). As the editors explain of Foucault's genealogical subject, "subjects do not first preexist and later enter into combat or harmony […] the world is not a play which simply masks a truer reality that exists behind the scenes. It is as it appears" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, p. 109). Foucault disavows concepts such as ideology, false consciousness, and hegemony (for him, everything is reality—there is no deep structure or backstage). Yet, Foucauldian studies of power and subjectivity have been criticized for not theorizing opportunities for resistance, particularly within the everyday, localized struggles of organizational life (Mumby, 2005).

This study focuses on the productive, positive nature of power—a capacity to spark action. But, I take up the Foucauldian position that resistance is not a separate, dialectical tension of power relations. Foucault describes the relationship between power and resistance in the following manner: "every power relationship implies, at least *in potentia*, a strategy of struggle, in which the two forces are not superimposed, do not lose their specific nature, or do not finally become confused" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 225, emphasis in original). Importantly, this is not a dialectical struggle that propels humanity along a determined teleology, nor is it the synthesis of two forces through union or compromise. Thus, power exists only in the freedom of both relational forces. "This means that in power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all" (Foucault, 1997, p. 292).

Additionally, as illustrated in the power/knowledge diagram in Appendix C, "power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault, 1977, pp. 27-28). Power as a strategic social relation is inseparable from pleasure. In discussing the moralizing social D/discourses about sexuality, Foucault (1978) writes of the "perpetual spirals of power and pleasure"—a game in which "the power that lets itself be invaded by the pleasure it is pursuing; and opposite it, power asserting itself in the pleasure of showing off, scandalizing, or resisting" (p. 45). The marriage of power and pleasure incite capacity—a life force that can enhance or reduce the affective potential of social relations within a particular field of power/knowledge boundaries. As a result, the effects of power/knowledge/resistance/pleasure should be investigating not from the perspective of exclusion, negation, and/or repression, but through the "positive mechanisms, insofar as they produce knowledge, multiply discourse, induce pleasure, and generate power" (Foucault, p. 73). "Life as a work of art" underscores *both* the pleasures *and* struggles of becoming processes of self.

Knowledge effect: Organizing processes.

Organizational discourses such as rituals, artifacts, values, and storytelling, give a voice to the organization (Cooren, 2011). Furthermore, "if there is anything that we call an organization, a society, or even a country, it must exist through all these ventriloqual effects of representation/ incarnation/materialization/reification" (Cooren, p. 6). As such, organizing processes and "voice" are always already political. Storytelling is one such means for reproducing organizing rationalities (Mumby, 1987). "Narratives do not simply *inform* organization members about the values, practices, and traditions to which their organization is committed. Rather, they help to *constitute* the organizational consciousness of social actors by articulating and embodying a particular reality, and subordinating or devaluing other modes of 'organization rationality'" (Mumby, 1987, p. 125, emphasis in original).

Organizing processes also rely on discourses of difference. Research on difference in organizing shapes our understandings of the ways in which difference is discursively constituted and institutionalized in processes of organizing and identity construction. For example, research on gender (Acker, 1990; Blair, Brown & Baxter, 1994; Trethewey, 1997), race (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003), age (Trethewey, 2001), and sexuality (Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009) indicate professional identities constituted by markers of difference within otherwise normative constructions/performances of white, heterosexual masculinity, are "continually subject to change as the relations, practices, and discourses which surround individuals change" (Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009, p. 770). Yet, a question researchers continue to grapple with is how to conduct methodological analyses that get at the complex D/discourses and power relations, spanning micro- and macro-level analyses and material/symbolic syntheses, that shape organizing processes and interactions constituting professional identities. For example, organizational scholars have grappled with the complexities of intersectional analyses in occupations as diverse as airline pilots (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004), nail salon technicians (Kang, 2010), and manual laborers (Wolkowitz, 2006).

From a management consulting professionalism perspective, difference is sometimes constructed through perceived capabilities. One consulting executive noted:

> Certain opinions are more valuable to me than others. If you're a C-player and you're not having a great experience, I'm not as interested as if you were an A-player or a B-player that I can turn into an A.

An area for consulting firm development is the communication of professionalism expectations, according to many of the consultants I interviewed. One consultant said "professionalism is word of mouth and anecdotal." Another consultant was interested in "how do you capture best practices over the years?" In many firms, there is little time to devote to capturing consultant experience, knowledge, and techniques in formal documents or databases. Thus, social networking is a primary means for sharing organizational information.

In the preceding sections, I have provided some examples of the ways in which discourse, power, and attendant knowledge effects have been conceptualized in organizational studies. I have further explicated these power/knowledge effects through examples from my management consulting interviews. In the next section, I focus on the self as an effect of power/knowledge relations—the discursive effect most relevant to an understanding of "life as a work of art" for the next chapter.

The Self: Life as a Work of Art

I briefly described the dimensions of Foucault's ethic of self in Chapter One (ethical substance, modes of subjection, self-forming activity, and telos) and the subsequent chapter takes up this analytical framework for my interviews in more detail. However, in this section, I concentrate on the intersections of power, knowledge, and discourse effecting constructions of self. This balancing of *both* rationality and passion *and* discipline and pleasure—as integrative forces, rather than dialectical tensions—points to the complexity, messiness, and shifting activities of becoming work.

Although organizational research often focuses on particular features of identity (e.g., constructions of difference like race, gender, sexuality, or class) to make sense of organizing processes, experiences, and relationships, “selves are never fixed, coherent, seamless, bounded or whole” (Collinson, 2003, p. 534). As Kondo (1990) describes in her ethnographic study of the intersections between power, gender, and identity in Japanese factory work, “identity is not a fixed ‘thing,’ it is negotiated, open, shifting, ambiguous, the result of culturally available meanings and the open-ended, power-laden enactments of those meanings in everyday situations” (p. 24). Through particular power/knowledge relations, attempts are made to fix identity (Knights, 2009). D/discourses work to *both* sustain *and* pull apart identity articulations for strategic purposes and this is a constant antagonism and negotiation. But, as identity cannot be fixed, there is always already a space for doing and being otherwise (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996).

In contradistinction to connotations of identity as autonomous or transcendental, the concept of subjectivity reflects the intersections of identity, discourse, and power relations (Knights & Willmott, 1989). “Rejecting the essentialist view of human nature, subjectivity is understood as a product of disciplinary mechanisms, techniques of surveillance and power-knowledge strategies” (Knights & Willmott, p. 554). Although critiques of post-structuralism focus on the deterministic reduction of humans to socially constructed subjectivities (see, for example, Contu, 2008), others argue that antagonisms between identity, discourse, and power open up conditions of possibility (Holmer-Nadesan, 1996).

Foucault (1977, 1978) addresses the intersections of discourse, power, and bodies. He famously noted “the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (Foucault, 1977, p. 25). For example, in Nadeem’s (2011) ethnography of call center work in India, employee identities are trained and socialized through the lens of Western, white, heterosexual masculine performances of professionalism. Through complex processes of code switching, name changing, location masking, and tonal inflections, Indian employees are successful to the extent to which they initiate and maintain their selves through the eyes of Western constructions of professionalism. Both the mind and body of the employee are part of the commercial exchange. As such, the worker body and subjectivity are both commodified as human capital within call center operations, but also as an entrepreneurial subject cultivating a care of the colonized construction of self.

The studies mentioned thus far focus on the suffocating effects of identity work within the constraints of power/knowledge formations. Yet, several organizational studies complicate this portrayal of identification work and contribute to a "life as a work of art" approach. For example, Contu (2008) argues postmodern forms of resistance such as humor, and post-structuralist subjectivities are forms of "decaf resistance." Here, a Real act of resistance, in the Lacanian sense, requires a rejection of subjectivities rooted in identity politics of neoliberal "care of the self" projects. Contu's argument challenges organizational studies that attempt to monolithically address power as a tool that can be wielded by discursively contextualized subjectivities for change. For Contu, the impossibility of resistance is overcome by an economy of enjoyment—a jouissance. Contu's psychoanalytical framework in which the subject (and body) disappears provokes continued discussion over what counts as change and what counts as resistance, and, at the same time, recognizes power/knowledge/subjectivity intersections with pleasure.

In another study, Trethewey (1997) identified parody as a form of power/knowledge resistance in a women's social service organization. The pleasure clients experienced through laughter at the expense of mocking social workers shifted control/resistance dynamics through renegotiated subjectivities (embodied however momentarily), and negated disciplinary technologies (institutionalized confessional practices). Through the complex interplay of power/resistance/pleasure, discourse—in this context, parody and laughter—challenged the institutional marginalization and disqualification of client knowledge and experience. As Mumby (2009) later argued, humor can destabilize professional identities and open opportunities for more democratic decision-making and interpersonal connection.

These pleasures are an important dimension of power/knowledge intersections. Burawoy's (1979) game of "making out" provides a kind of pleasurable "life force" (Trethewey, 2004) for workers through the intersections of power, individual resistance, and knowledge of the system, which has the effect of recapturing a kind of creativity/humanness while simultaneously reinscribing modes of capitalist production. In this sense, the creativity of gaming the system is both an act of resistance and reinscription to extant power relations in the factory. Within the knowledge economy, creativity has been positioned as an innate human capability on the one hand, and as a learnable capability, if you want to join the "creative class," on the other hand (Florida, 2002; Pink, 2006). Creativity brings pleasure to knowledge work. Yet, for Florida and Pink, creativity must be cultivated. This means certain bodies/subjectivities are privileged over others. Particular expert subjectivities are produced within the same discursive regime and reify what counts as knowledge (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Townley, 1993). As such, the pleasure of creative work is bound by strategic power relations, which are often articulated within discourses of expertise, education, and class.

Moving forward, these studies contribute to an understanding of the ways in which management consulting professionalism expectations can stimulate *both* pleasure and struggle *and* self-enhancing and self-detracting capacities. One consultant described the pleasure of professionalism as stimulant for action:

> You’re never stuck in one industry, sector, or job. The things I’m doing now are very different from what I was doing two to three years ago. There’s always a lot of innovation and change.

At the same time, professionalism as “the ability to execute” affects constant struggle. Although management consulting work can be intellectually stimulating, one consultant confessed: “It’s a little scary because just when you think you have everything under control and understand how things work, you realize you don’t know anything.” These quotes foreshadow *both* the modes of subjection *and* pleasurable teleologies indicative of a “life as a work of art” ethos.

Deetz (1992) argues, “the politics of identity and identity representation may be the deepest and most suppressed struggle in the workplace, and hence the ‘site’ where domination and responsive agency are most difficult to unravel” (p. 59). As such, I feel it is important to take great care to avoid the potential violence that can occur in framing research participants monolithically through particular markers of difference, as “subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc.” (Foucault, 1980, p. 97). Care has been taken in this regard in the presentation of management consultant experiences related to professional development in the next chapter to reflect the myriad planes of power/knowledge relations cutting through constructions of self.

Investigating the multiple D/discourses inherent to “life as a work of art” highlights the complicated web of articulations shaping how professionalism is constituted and legitimized within the management consulting industry. In Foucault’s conceptualization of discourse, bodies are discursively marked effects, so images of management consultant dress and comportment are informative elements in the becoming activities of professional management consultants. Business schools as "sites" of recruiting, training, and socialization produce particular subjectivities to be channeled into management consulting firms. As already discussed, popular press publications also offer discursive articulations of management consulting professionalism expectations (and perceived failures). As a last example, former management consultants—as archived effects of the various interplays of discourse, power, and identity—can offer insights into the web of social networks that may continue to reify the power/knowledge of management consultant work in other industries.

Summary

Politics is "the articulation of various individual and group interests through the everyday enactment of the communicative processes that produce, reproduce, resist, and transform collective (intersubjective) structures of meaning" (Mumby, 2001, p. 587). This chapter has explored the relationships and articulations of conceptualizations of discourse, power, knowledge, and identity in critical management studies and resuscitated some of the philosophical principles from the late philosophers Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Foucault. The unique contribution of critical management studies within a discursive methodological appropriation of Foucauldian and Nietzschean conceptualization of power/knowledge relations is its commitment to challenging that which is taken-for-granted. That which is taken-for-granted is often part of the mundane, everyday interactions, and processes of organizational experience. But, organizational actors are living, breathing, complex humans who defy simplistic explanations of their thought processes, decision making, and relational interactions. Significantly, these everyday politics of organizing are made up of complex communicative practices that enable broader social relationships and structures to be produced, sedimented in material ways, and reified.

Work is an embodied experience that is communicatively constructed, which is exciting not only because of the complexity and delicacy it then requires as a researcher to put puzzle pieces together (only to find there is no complete puzzle, and most pieces don't fit—in fact, you're probably not even working on the puzzle you thought you were working on). But, that's part of the fun and can facilitate some of the productive passion in rational analysis. Additionally, it means there is a whole world of change possible. Combining the linguistic turn with the advent of critical organizational studies suggests the many dimensions of possibility spanning the varied *both-and* tensions of micro-macro and discursive-non-discursive phenomena. This means there is always *potentia* for affect and doing otherwise.

The discursive constitution of world-making means conceptual and symbolic frameworks can and do shift, mutate, shatter, congeal, etc. Rethinking the common sense and the taken for granted highlights the political and discursive dimensions of meaning fixing, which reflect particular viewpoints and interests. While it is easy to suggest that hope for alternatives in this context means continual innovation, I want to be careful about not reproducing a neoliberal agenda of entrepreneurialism or teleology toward an unlikely utopian work experience. But, I do believe questions and critiques about the intricate, generative webs of relations between discourse, power, knowledge, and identity have helped, and continue to help, build understandings of what it means (and what it could mean) to be human at work.

Foucault and Nietzsche's work problematizes the taken-for-grantedness of ideals and reveal how various truth/knowledge claims are produced and naturalized by strategic relationships and processes. Within the management consulting industry, the marketing, sale, and execution of consulting "best practices" and "benchmarks" can be positioned as problematic because it claims a neutral knowledge expertise that is actually historically rooted in cost cutting, profit maximization, market expansion, competitive closure, and professional veneers—market-driven philosophies with social, political, and economic implications. On the other hand, these same practices also facilitate great influence and impact on businesses attempting to improve organizational cultures, operational policies, and products/services to make life easier for people (regardless of perceived judgments of this success or value).

Through strategic recruiting, intense training and normative professionalism expectations, management consultants learn and embody professionalism in order to produce client value and collaborative partnerships. The effects of these activities and relationships have long-term and unforeseeable affects—as these products continue to affect and be affected by consultant training, professional development, and socialization into industry leadership positions at major, international corporations. The use of traditional strategy firms (and how former consultants saturate senior management positions in corporations) is often unseen, unpublicized, and unregulated as an architect and conduit of industry strategy, information, and administration. Within these strategic power relations, I am interested in how varied articulations of professionalism are experienced as *both* discipline *and* pleasure by management consultants in the continual crafting of professional identity. The next chapter looks at the material effects and symbolic practices of management consulting professional becomings.

IV. Art: The Professional Management Consultant

“Love is a joy, accompanied by the idea of an external cause”

(Spinoza, 1996)

Management consultants learn what it means to be a professional in a variety of ways. Academic literature has proffered a few ideas on the motives and effects of professional identity construction in management consulting firms. Management consulting firms assist in crafting professional identities by “fostering a ‘professional’ appearance and ‘elite identity’ […] to build trust and reputation” (Muzio, Kirkpatrick & Kipping, 2011, p. 817). This research gives a sense of the value of professionalism to the success of individual consultants and long-term survival of consulting firms. Missing from this research, though, is an understanding of personal motivation, pleasure, and aspiration that may not be tied to profit motives. This chapter seeks to address this limitation by exploring the ways in which becoming professional renders management consultants as *both* subject *and* agent in the artistic construction of occupational identity.

As previously discussed, ethics, for purposes of this project, is about the relationship with one’s self, “which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions” (Foucault, 1997, p. 263). There are four dimensions to this relationship: self-forming activity, mode of subjectivation, ethical substance, and telos. These activities are *both* interdependent *and* independent and *both* active *and* reactive in terms of capacity for affect within a field of power/knowledge.

The elements contained within each of the following dimensions of self are neither exhaustive nor linear. My intention in this chapter is to retain a spirit of genealogical exploration, rather than point to causal relationships or psychological subtexts. I urge readers to think about the following self-forming activities as a professional ethos—crafting a messy and unfinished portrait of life as a professional management consultant—as opposed to a synthesis of ways and means that suggest a moralized intention or progressive achievement. Bauman & Donskis (2013) warn "you cannot hope to know everything about a human being and think you can know them to the end because in that way you destroy their freedom and uniqueness" (p. 212). In other words, life as a work of art is never finished, never linear, and never perfected. As such, the activities described in upcoming sections point to the continual work, shifting (and, therefore, indeterminate) causes/end points, and the concomitant joys and violence of our imperfect selves and the world around us.

Management consultants often are charged with making sense of and negotiating complex D/discourses in which they must make choices about the power relations invested in knowledge claims, the pleasures of prestige and material manifestations of professional achievement, the desire to make an impact and contribute to something bigger than self, and the tensions of manufacturing client value within disciplinary gazes of both colleagues and clients. How are management consultants caring for themselves—simultaneously constraining, liberating, enjoying, resisting, commodifying, thriving—within discourses of professionalism?

Self-Forming Activity

This section explores the activities management consultants engage in to become professional. For Foucault (1997), this involves answering the question "what are the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects?" (p. 265). Based on consultant accounts, there are two primary ways in which consultants work on professional identities: activities in preparation for consulting careers (anticipatory socialization) and observation of normative actions and attitudes (emulation).

Anticipatory Socialization

Although educational background, personal upbringing, and prior corporate work experiences are intimately linked with other modes of subjectivation, the ways in which consultants brought up these aspects of their life was by framing them as things they did or experienced *on their own*, before coming to the management consulting industry. Thus, I present them as self-forming activities that contributed to the becoming work of management consulting professionalism. Interestingly, some consultants attributed professionalism to their educational training, while others attributed the development of a professional ethos to personal upbringing.

Academic programs, such as engineering and business, teach potential consultants analytical skill sets that can be utilized on the job. A former consultant describes how his educational pursuits led him to IT consulting work:

> I came from an engineering background and realized during my course of studies that I did not want to go into the science field. I wanted to do something more practical. By nature of my major, I had to take computer science classes. So, consulting kind of brought the best of those worlds together. They were just looking for intelligent people. So, problem solving is something I like to do. There was a good mesh there coming out of college.

While technical skills and intellectual horsepower are key capabilities management consulting firms look for in potential recruits, the creation and maintenance of preferred university pools can limit the kinds of people being brought into the industry. Recruitment and selection practices can naturalize inequalities within labor processes (Williams & Connell, 2010, p. 372). These intersections of difference (or, lack thereof) become naturalized structurally and discursively within the recruiting process, thus contributing to the development of a commodified subjectivity that privileges certain bodies over others. Or, as Macdonald & Sirianni (1996) suggest, identity markers such as gender, class, age, and other social identities are used as proxies for personality and capability.

These boundaries are often constructed under the guise of placement statistics. Dean (2005) found that drama schools increasingly bring in women who look a certain way in order to "improve their destinations" (p. 766) post-graduation. Schools increasingly recruit students who match the kinds of candidates recruiting organizations seek. When I interviewed for business school, my recruiter informed me that students with management consulting experience were particularly desirable to business schools because those students often found jobs quickly through marketable skills sets (regardless of industry/function pursued), thus ensuring a positive effect on the school's employment statistics.

Indeed, one consulting executive described the management consulting recruiting process in the following manner:

> Most firms go to particular universities and are pretty homogenous in terms of the kind of people they bring in: strong academic credentials, shown success in previous careers, and doing well in the case interview.

Management consulting firms participating in university on-campus recruiting programs will conduct information sessions for interested undergraduate and graduate students. These sessions serve to provide information about the firm, expectations about consultants as a broader occupational collective, and to emulate the professional demeanor required of interested recruits.

One former consultant was recruited into a large, international consulting firm out of her undergraduate program at an Ivy League school. She says:

> I went to an information session to begin with. McKinsey had one, too. They have alumni come back and describe it [management consulting work] and a lot of them have a very strong on-campus recruitment process. At my school, they really hit hard at the engineering school. And, probably the business school, too. At [university], most of the

people they hired were from engineering because they liked the thought process and the mindset of the people they got from there.

At her school, the engineering program provided anticipatory socialization to management consulting work. The "right kind" of person, with particularly trained "mindsets" is strategically recruited. Preferred recruiting schools also help management consulting firms construct marketable professional identities that will assist firms in selling work to potential clients. During client presentations to sell work, the academic pedigree of consultants was often highlighted as a way to promote the professionalism of consultants.

Relatedly, an MBA degree is considered a historical gateway into traditional consulting firms. In fact, one consultant went so far as to say that "there's a ceiling it would be hard to get past without an MBA" at his management consulting firm. However, the consultant alluded to recruiting practices being such that this was not really an issue since most firm consultants were recruited out of a local MBA program. One consultant argued that one of the things his former firm did well was recruiting the ideal consultant—"a type-A personality who wants to succeed." Based on his experience over the years he has added to that requirement:

> What I've added to that formula over the years is emotional maturity or intelligence. I'm looking for people with a proven track record of leadership and success—captain of the football team and A/B honor roll, other meaningful contributions outside of their core area, and the types of personality traits, like low self orientation. And, I read this somewhere, it was written by a coach—does the guy love his mother? If a kid is disrespectful or not showing appropriate love for his mother, I know he's going to be a tough kid to coach. But, if he professes his love for her and is thankful for all she's done for him—that's a kid I can work with.

Thus, while education and technical training are important elements firms seek in hiring consultants, it is the "softer" skills that facilitate successful embodiment and enactment of professionalism as a consultant. In terms of values, strength through humility, love for Others, and an orientation toward positive action are elements of professional success not traditionally associated with management consulting accounts.

Involvement in MBA consulting clubs reflects another self-forming activity some consultants pursue while in business school. Consulting clubs offer industry information, interview case preparation, networking opportunities, and case competitions that end up providing anticipatory socialization and expectations for life as a consultant. One current consultant described his case competition experience in one such club as highly beneficial:

> What was really helpful was to the extent we were connected with actual consultants. An example of that is a case competition that we participated in that was sponsored by Deloitte. So, having Deloitte there was really helpful and gave us better perspective.

The participation of current consultants provides information about how things get done "in the real world," but also offer opportunities to observe professionalism, communication, and expertise in action. Common club competitions include both team and individual competitions.

There are many variations, of course, to school case competitions. For example, in one case, teams of four to five students are assembled and each team receives a big question (e.g., "the case to crack") from the sponsoring consulting firm. The teams have the whole night to work on it and are expected to present their recommendations in the morning. In some competitions, teams are given four to five days to work. In all these team competitions, what is important are the team's preparation level, thoughtful insights and recommendations, and professional presentation. An individual case competition might involve a student receiving a case. Then, the person immediately reads the case and engages in a 20-minute, on-the-spot discussion with a judge. These judges are often current and former consultants hired to help students successfully navigate the case interview. The judge picks one person to move on to the next stage of the competition. The importance of this activity for consulting club members is the more intimate exposure and networking offered by these one-on-one discussions.

Consulting clubs help members network with industry members, practice professionalism in mock interviews and case competitions, and develop problem-solving logics through classes and seminars. Harney (2007) critiques research in critical management studies that uses business school socialization practices as a hammer for the proliferation of managerialism. However, the privatization of some academic concentrations through corporate sponsorships and partnerships suggests the business school remains a meaningful domain for establishing anticipatory understandings of corporate work and life. Research suggests the competitive recruiting practices, such as the case interview, and selective hiring requirements contribute to the construction of elite professional identities of management consultants (Alvesson & Robertson, 2006).

A current MBA consulting club member explained that participation in the club has helped differentiate between previous industry experience and management consulting expectations:

> The biggest difference between engineering and consulting is that, in engineering, the only thing that matters is the end result. If it works better than before, then you are successful. In consulting, the process is important. You can have a good result, but if you don't communicate it right, then the result doesn't matter.

As discussed in Chapter Two, management consulting professionalism is an integral part of the value clients and colleagues cherish in the client-consultant exchange. Consulting club participation retools communication practices and behaviors, particularly for those students who came back for their MBA in order to make a career change from another industry.

The *potentia* and drive for becoming professional within MBA student clubs should not be underestimated. As another current consultant reflected about his consulting club experience in school:

> [At my job before coming to business school,] there wasn't a strong culture of professionalism and I was never really developed. It came to be—honestly, it was when I was going through b-school and I was preparing for consulting interviews and going to happy hours and just interacting with the rest of my business school classmates, that I really understood how much more I would need to mature. Or, how much more I would have to make a stronger effort in social situations to be social and interactive, but at the same time, professional.

This consultant points to the mediating role of professionalism as an action that simultaneously balances *both* maturity *and* savvy social skills. But, the exact dynamic of this is ambiguous and difficult to explain and teach. It is through both instruction and interaction that this consultant was able to shift his professional self to meet the expectations set forth by the consulting club at his school. Second year MBA consulting club members take on a lot of responsibility for training and assimilating first year students, based upon their summer internship experiences and/or former consulting work and club training.

On the other hand, many of the participants in this study were not familiar with the management consulting industry prior to beginning with their respective firms and did not actively participate in MBA consulting clubs. These consultants suggest that professionalism is something that is either innate or learned from one's upbringing, rather than from training or emulation. Regarding the recruiting and selection process, one former consultant says:

> A lot of things related to management consulting are innate to me. I've always been "by the rules person" and "serious person" and "respectful person". I came in with it. A lot of people who come into that field are like that, to some extent, to begin with. I don't know anybody within the company that wasn't a [pauses]. They hire "Type A personality" from top schools that are serious, structured people to begin with.

Several consultants noted that professionalism is something their firm tries to hire people in with, rather than train it. It is unclear to me based upon these interviews whether or not these personality traits are truly innate (an essence/nature of strength from a Nietzschean perspective) or whether these traits are socially constructed through gender roles, education institutions, and broader social and political discourses (an effect of power/knowledge relations from a Foucauldian perspective.)

To this end, a few consultants pointed to the professionalism standards set by parents, uncles, and siblings. One current consultant said “my mother was in business and she stressed how important it is for young women to have a very professional, can-do attitude in the business world. I took that to heart.” Similarly, another consultant explained that his father was a Chief Information Officer at a bank and “he always carried himself with a great deal of integrity. I was raised in that environment where that’s your guaranteed part. It’s not something you mess with.” These consultant reflections suggest that professionalism reflects values and comportment learned from personal upbringing.

As such, professionalism definitions and expectations are tied to broader D/discourses, which may include geographical culture, social constructions of gender, and family relationships and values, among others. Combined, educational background and personal upbringing provide screening mechanisms in the recruiting process to ensure the hiring of people who would be a good fit. It also provides anticipatory socialization for the norms, mindsets, and expectations of management consulting professionalism. In some sense, then, management consultants begin their tenure with firms already imbued with images of how a professional management consultant acts.

Emulation

The second primary method for becoming a professional management consultant through self-forming activity is emulation. In order to finesse their understandings of management consulting professionalism from educational and familial associations, new consultants observe and emulate other consultants. This includes such activities as mentally capturing “how they walk the halls, how they sit in meetings, how they take notes.” By watching and listening, consultants learn the cultural norms and behaviors of firm-specific professionalism expectations.

In particular, the business attire and bodily comportment of senior executives is often imitated throughout the organizational hierarchy. However, management consulting standards for professionalism create unique mimetic performances, as consultant executives imitate client executives and consultants emulate consultant executives. A description of this mimetic performance of professionalism was brought up by a former consultant:

> They’ll [partners in the management consulting firm] be like their [client] counterparts. But, also that’s being observed by the junior people in the firm. If Partner Jones is doing this, then that must be the way I need to do things. So, I probably want to look and act and talk like Partner Jones. That’s what I want to aspire to.

Given the predominance of white heterosexual men in senior management positions, we get a sense of the mimetic performance of masculinity that coheres around dress code and bodily comportment. This supports Rumens & Kerfoot’s (2009) conclusion that, “professional ‘knowing,’ as theoretical knowledge, as technical expertise, and as a mode of being and relating, reproduces a way of engaging with the world that is gendered masculine” (p. 766). This can be problematic for women moving into firm partnerships, as it is difficult to find female mentors to emulate.

Because professionalism is tied to a white heterosexual masculinity aesthetic (Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009), the result is that emulating management consulting professionalism can be incredibly difficult emotionally and physically. A female former consultant shares:

> It wasn't until early to mid-90s that they allowed women to wear pantsuits. Sometimes it was hard to find suits with skirts because they kept going shorter and shorter which was the fashion. But that doesn't work.

This consultant also went on to discuss the common concerns of her female colleagues about being "too sexy." When I was a consultant, some of the rules for women's dress included: skirts could not be higher than two inches above the knee, no open-toed shoes, and must wear hosiery if wearing a skirt. As a consultant with a background in art, one female consulting executive remarked that it bothered her that she had to regulate her wardrobe in the name of management consulting professionalism by choosing muted colors and clothing shapes to mask her body, instead of the beautiful prints and colors her friends and family members would purchase while shopping together.

Beyond the challenges of dress, emulating professionalism standards within the industry also proves challenging from a communication perspective. Emulation of the executive men around her was one coping mechanism for this female consultant, as she "learned how to play with the boys:"

> It's an old, white man world. That's a fair statement. I would also go so far as to say, though, that if you, as a woman, don't know how to play in that old, white man world, then it's your own damn fault. So, I think that you…there was a woman who would say to me, "But, I want to be a woman. I want to be a woman." And, I would say to her, "it's okay to be a woman, but think like a man." […] So, typically what I tell them is, "you can turn around and learn about a sport. Right? Any sport. And, learn it backwards and forwards. And, learn the history behind it. You'll always be able to say, "well, Lou Gehrig did blah, blah, blah." For me, that's always been hockey because I grew up watching hockey with my father. So, when people start talking hockey and they equate some superstar in hockey right now, I'll be like "oh, yeah, he was like a Gretsky or Howe." And, right away you command—you get respect in the room that you didn't get. I can't explain it. I call it "learning how to play with the boys."

In order to become professional, this consultant suggests that women need to learn the language of men—sports. Commanding respect as a professional, then, requires women (and, men) to adopt a mindset potentially counterintuitive to one's interests, aspirations, and needs. Is this a coping mechanism or a reification of extant hegemonic heterosexual masculinity that the organizing work of professionalism engenders? Or, both?

The stakes are high for consultants who do not adapt, assimilate, and embody the organizational aesthetic of professionalism. As one male consultant describes, failure to embody expectations of professionalism can have serious consequences, as was the case for one of his new employees who was fired due to showing up late for meetings and smoking at the client site:

> If they're just a plain, garden-variety consultant in terms of talent, they're going to get exited from the company pretty quickly. If they would have been a whiz-kid we might have chosen to work through it with them. We might try to communicate culture and professionalism more aggressively, but we didn't have the time or inclination to do that with somebody who was just an ordinary type performer.

In this narrative, the importance of becoming professional is integral to consultant performance. Presumably, this consultant had the academic background or industry experience to get hired into the firm. At an early stage of his employment, the consultant exhibited behaviors indicating that he was not emulating the professionalism expected by his firm. Rather than invest time and resources helping the consultant learn those professionalism expectations more explicitly through communication or training, the consultant was fired.

Consultants observe appropriate professional behaviors on client sites, at firm home office meetings, and in social contexts. As one consultant describes:

> Any of these internal meetings where you're bringing people that weren't recently on your project team all back into the office. Not only are you interacting with them and feeding off them—and, they all have high levels of professionalism. So, you're kind of feeding off of each other. And, having that kind of cycle where you're around professional people, you are kind of forced to act in a professional manner.

This suggests that emulating professionalism is not just a matter of top-down forced emulation. There is agency involved in observing Others—a decision-making process of finding one's own professional aesthetic. Or, in other words, from watching the interactions and behaviors of mentors, colleagues, and senior executives, management consultants make decisions about how they want to be professional. As one consultant said, emulation enabled her to see "what I liked and didn't like about the approach." From interactions with senior executives, "you can read between the lines about how they became successful." Thus, emulation is important not only for meeting firm expectations regarding professionalism, but also for the longer-term construction of professional identities.

Implications

Prevalent neoliberal discourses privilege market-driven approaches, reduced governmental protections, and individualistic cultural values. In neoliberalism, "the market is the site of veridiction for every sphere for speaking of all things" (Brown, 2012). Importantly, these changes shift risks from organizations to employees (Kalleberg, 2011). There is an increasing precarity experienced in both 'good' and 'bad' jobs in contemporary organizations, characterized by fewer worker protections such as unions and no implicit employment contracts (Kalleberg, 2011). Individuals are subject to increased insecurity and powerlessness in 21st century employment relationships. Conditions of precarity are important for understanding professionalism because, as Fournier (1999) points out, "the appeal to professionalism is one of the strategies that is deployed to control the increasing margin of indeterminancy or flexibility in work" (p. 281). As such, professionalism partners with neoliberalism and governmentality to redirect responsibility onto the individual employee for the becoming activities associated with professional identity construction.

These self-forming activities result in a more easily observable and classifiable subject from a firm perspective. Foucault (1977) writes about the examination that reduces individuality to a profiled "case" (p. 191). The anticipatory socialization assists in this process and case interview recruiting/selection procedures judges, measures, and compares the individual among others. Formal firm evaluations continue this process of evaluation by identifying who "has to be trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded, etc." (Foucault, p. 191). Project teams facilitate this concertive control and the close working environments of client engagements enable colleagues to successfully emulate professionalism expectations, or risk being identified as a non-conformer (and, in the case of the smoking consultant, fired). Firms seemingly take varying levels of responsibility in training professionalism, thus anticipatory socialization and emulation are critical dynamics that make it easier for new consultants to meet expectations as professionals.

Yet, I would be remiss not to mention the positivity of such self-forming practices, such as emulation. As Spinoza (1996) notes, emulation generates a desire to imitate "what we judge to be honorable, useful, or pleasant" (p. 110). Indeed, one consultant addressed this point directly in his comment that "good consultants try to serve as a compass, as a sort of guiding light to inform everyday actions. This is a good thing that people get from professionalism." The passion created by being affected by someone for whom we have positive, loving (joy of affect, rather than romantic) feelings can be internalized and transformed into a rational application or principle that becomes an active capacity to affect another in a similar fashion.

Modes of Subjectivation

In the previous section, consultants explained the ways in which they discipline themselves in the becoming processes of professionalism. This section explores the external forces that put pressure on consultants. Or, as Foucault (1997) describes these modes of subjection: “the way in which people are invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations” (p. 264). From our interview conversations, it seems consultants most frequently experience calls for professionalism from clients, colleagues, firm evaluations, material rewards, and time and space constraints.

Clients

A consultant’s work revolves around “who is my client and how can I deliver value?” Several consultants maintain that professionalism is an orientation and commitment to client needs. There is an underlying rational rule guiding this question as consultants feel pressure to exceed client perceptions of consultant value because of the high price of consulting services, as well as to cultivate the potential for future work. As one consultant remembered, “I once had a manager say that if we were asked to stand on our head in the corner and spit wooden nickels, we would do it.”

The effect of an all-consuming client-service orientation is that it leaves open very little room for productive conflict. Rather than seeking collaboration or compromise, in many cases, firms err on the side of the client during client-consultant disagreements. One consultant talked about a misunderstanding between himself and a client:

> I really didn’t have the opportunity to challenge the person who had accused me. Kind of like, they are the client, what was said was said. I couldn’t defend myself. I couldn’t make an issue with her. You kind of have to accept it and move on.

One of the things I heard frequently as a consultant was that part of the value of hiring a consultant is that clients did not have to deal with human resources issues for those consultants. Although difficult in practice, this notion of forgiveness helps develop the positive, long-term potential of client-consultant relationships, as will be discussed further in Chapter Five. In this scenario, professionalism is an action resulting in *both* the squelching of democratic conflict resolution *and* the promise of forgiveness in order to move forward in action, rather than resentment.

Consultants often talked about always being "on." There is always the possibility of clients stopping by consultant offices. Additionally, the client regularly provides informal and formal feedback on consultant deliverables and interactions. One medium for this is consultant facilitation of presentations. The client "gaze" can be particularly intense in these moments, as one consultant describes:

> A partner put me on the spot in the middle of a meeting in front of the client […] it's one of those situations where I'll never forget it, you know what I mean? When the client looks at you like [pauses]. He didn't direct or shield me or shut it down. I'm the kind of person who always tries to shield the people working for me with the client or partner or whoever. But, he just let me take it.

Professionalism is called forth by clients in these situations, as it requires a great deal of emotional restraint, quick thinking, and personal poise. Perhaps because of difficult situations such as this one, consultants maintain an aesthetic and ethos of professionalism as a trained method of their occupational craft—to safeguard against the client's sometimes demoralizing gaze.

Consultants are also put into the spotlight through client interactions at times and in spaces outside of boardrooms. At one of my roll-off lunches for a project I had completed, the client for whom I had worked asked me to stand up in front of my colleagues and other clients while he gave a speech about me. He then proceeded to wrap his arm around my waist and talk about my beauty as a team member, rather than any of the work I had performed on the team. The unprofessionalism I perceived in my client activated an acute awareness of my own trained professionalism, as I felt unable to address this violation of my personal space and professional identity under the public gaze of my professional colleagues and clients.

The intensity of client-consultant interactions can be exacerbated by cultural stereotypes of consultants:

> Many times there was also some resentment towards the consultants, especially when we were young and inexperienced. So, it was a challenge to maintain professionalism when faced with clients who doubted your work ability, experience, and resented you as a vehicle of change.

One coping mechanism for consultants is the assimilation of client norms and a consummate enactment of professionalism. While this can enhance the reputation of individual consultants on project sites, professional reputation is also crucial for management consulting firms.

Firms often compete with each other in proposal work for clients and during the implementation of project work. Consultants increasingly work alongside other consulting firms on client engagements. This increases competition between firms for follow-on work and also in day-to-day activities and client interactions. When one consultant on his team made blatant math errors in a client deliverable, the client came back to the consulting executive and said "I've had to have this conversation with [other consulting firm on site], but I've not had to have it with you." The client comment reminded the project executive that firm reputation is always at risk and in direct comparison to other firms working onsite. The client comparison of consulting firms had the effect of spurning increased firm attention on professionalism.

The project contract brings consultants *both* promise *and* conflict in terms of client relations. While the contract legally binds firms to certain outputs or outcomes from the work, it also entails interpretation and renegotiation that includes productive conflict. "It is an uncomfortable situation when a client asks you to do something you're prohibited from doing or what is not in the contract or scope." Navigating these difficult conversations with clients is one manner in which consultants develop professionalism. Clients, then, *both* incite professionalism in a top-down manner *and* cultivate professionalism through opportunities for consultants to develop courage and integrity through the challenges of client-consultant relationships.

Colleagues

But, it is not only clients who subject professionalism expectations on consultants. Fellow consultants also feed into the becoming activities related to professionalism. It is not uncommon for consultants to work in very close quarters on client sites. Consultants often nickname the closet in which 10 consultants work in close proximity "the war room." Because of spatial constraints, opportunities abound for informal feedback from project team members. As one consultant noted, "you might get off the phone with someone and a colleague right beside you says, 'you might want to try something different.'" The close proximity also offers intimate insights into consultant observations of senior project members—and, not always in positive ways. One consultant commented, "they do things that you don't agree with, but then because they're in that position, you question maybe that's just how it's done?"

Even late at night at the firm office, with no clients present, the consultant body is monitored by colleagues, and—in this particular story by a former consultant—executives:

> This is one of my favorite stories to this day. We're all working late. There's this new guy. Our VP was visiting the satellite office. We're in the office. I see him come out of his office to the cube of the new guy who was wearing a full suit and tie, like he was supposed to. And, I remember him saying, "you know, when it gets to be 9 o'clock like this, it's okay if you loosen your tie." Not, "it's okay to take off your tie." Leave it on when there's 3 of us in the office—but, you may loosen it. It's so indicative of the outer and how we must appear. At 9 o'clock he could advise his underling to loosen his tie. That struck me as over the top […] it was all I could do not to laugh out loud.

I also experienced this monitoring of my body and dress from my colleagues in consulting. Although it had been raining on my way to a project social event after hours, my partner commented that the splashed up dirt on the cuff of my pants suggested that I was not disciplined.

When I periodically broke the rules and wore open-toed shoes, I was sure to have a fresh pedicure because I had found my female colleagues would notice any chips in the nail polish.

On the other hand, executive styles and standards, while potentially constraining, also can be inspirational. Consultant examples of professionalism often centered around executives whom they wished to emulate. Professionalism, in these instances, involved being relaxed, charismatic, engaging, and confident. One consultant described the potent effect one partner had on his project team of both consultants and clients: “he would deliver bad news and everyone would still be laughing.” Many consultants also described the professionalism colleagues expected in formal PowerPoint presentations as helping to develop communication skills highly valued by their current employers.

Sometimes unprofessionalism is accepted at higher levels of the firm hierarchy due to positional authority and established value to the firm in terms of utilization/revenue generation. This makes it more difficult for junior members to address problems at client sites, away from the home office and HR personnel. One consultant was verbally harassed by a consulting executive on his client site and was told that he had to deal with it within his project team. It was only after threatening to quit that the firm became involved. Professional expectations are such that consultants often believe that any situation can be handled on one’s own, if handled with professionalism. Yet, as this case demonstrates, responding to unprofessionalism with professionalism does not always resolve the issue.

One current consultant suggested that becoming a professional consultant involved accepting the pressures senior colleagues place on junior team members, by nature of consulting practices:

> As a more junior member of the team, you have relatively low visibility as to what’s coming. You know, your day and your weekend, your case experience can change based

> on a partner comment or a client comment that you can't necessarily anticipate. So, in addition to the number of hours, there's also just sort of visibility and stress around transparency, at times.

This is part of the accepted hierarchy within management consulting firms. Indeed, one consulting manager reasons that her consultants should be available as project resources without limitations. As manager, she can spontaneously take time away from the project to pick up her kids from school. But, her junior team members are expected to be on call and communicate scheduling conflicts in advance. Professionalism in this sense is about understanding one's positioning in relation to firm colleagues within the chain of command.

Firm Evaluations

Management consultants are called to be professional through formal firm evaluations. Although the industry does not require professional certification, the traditional strategy firms all have extensive consultant review processes in place to critique consultant professional capabilities and attitudes. Typically, consultants create professional development plans for the year, participate in 360 review processes for all colleagues, and receive feedback from senior consultants/executives during mid- and end-year review cycles. These formal evaluations assess consultant contributions to the development of self, firm, and the industry. Several consultants claimed their firms have an itemized place on review forms to assess consultant professionalism.

Here is one former consultant's description of how her firm's review process worked:

> It was really nice at [firm]. You're given a coach. And, that coach is a little bit different than most roles. That coach advocates for you at mid-year and end-year. And, so every person from manager and above gets at least 4 people. And, you become their coach and their sponsor. What you do is at mid-year, you reach out to all their partners that they've worked with and people they've worked with. You gather a 360 on them. And, then you present them at mid-year conferences on how they're doing. I think that was a huge learning tool for me [as a coach] because I kind of saw what not to do. So, in other words, it's really bad, I think you know this, if you get on a "in-firm" project. The firm projects are the ones that don't make money for the firm. And, you never want to get on them unless you've had a baby or you are sick and you want to stay home. And, here I

> was being offered firm projects left and right that sounded really cool because they were art-based. And, I was like, "yeah, I can do that." My counselors were like, "no, no, you can't do that."

From this account, professional achievement is tied to work on projects generating revenue for the firm. Internal projects are not coded in the same manner. This also suggests that even common life experiences, such as having a baby or getting sick, can affect a consultant's rating in professionalism. Conducting these formal evaluations of junior consultants provides managers with new dimensions of professionalism that may not have been clear prior to being part of these internal discussions as managers and mentors.

Evaluations are, of course, tied to promotions, raises, and bonuses—part of the material rewards for embodying professionalism. A former consultant describes firm evaluations, based on her experience working in HR, in the following way:

> It's a constant state of being on. We would always ask, "what have you done for yourself? What have you done for your firm? What have you done for your group?" And, if you couldn't answer those 3 questions, then you weren't a "1" and you were barely a "2," depending on which ones you could answer.

What is interesting is how this translates to a different role for the Human Resources group than in traditional corporations. Professional development is left in the hands of consultants—to identify training needs with the help of project partners and managers and complete those development activities in a timely and self-disciplined manner. Formal firm evaluations function to "check in" on consultants to see if the consultant has disciplined the professional self successfully.

Evaluations of self-disciplining are not relegated to the professional sphere, though. During one review cycle, I was surprised to learn that two personal matters had made their way into my formal professional evaluation. The first was a notation that I successfully trained for and completed a marathon while managing my project responsibilities. The second was that, despite being violently ill one day, I stayed at the client site until late at night in order to finish a PowerPoint presentation for a client meeting the next day. This blending of personal and professional selves into my job evaluation reinforced the benefits of embodying professionalism at all times—and, at the expense of my body. These comments also were inextricable from the significant bonus I received that review period. Thus, the material reward associated with these comments outweighed my initial surprise at their inclusion.

Material Rewards

Professional management consultants charge a lot of money for their advisory services and that money commonly comes back to consultants in the forms of base pay, quarterly/annual bonuses, and various material goods, such as firm t-shirts, project gifts, and so forth. As one consultant reminded me, "we don't do this for free. There's compensation and that's part of it." This compensation is very alluring. One consultant reflected that the starting compensation offered by her consulting firm was incomparable to the other employment offers she received coming out of her undergraduate program. Besides the baseline number of her salary, she also knew that she would likely not dip below that number, if she ever decided to leave the industry. But, it would be much more difficult to achieve that high of a salary without consulting experience.

Even coming out of undergraduate programs, new consultants are offered signing bonuses. These signing bonuses are quite lucrative coming out of MBA programs, though. According to the UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School website, the MBA class of 2012 averaged signing bonuses of roughly $25,000 (although not delineated by job function). MBA students going specifically into management consulting jobs were offered base salaries averaging $117,076. Most employment contracts also make allowances for relocation expenses.

Many consultants said that a perk of the industry was always having the latest technological gadgets. With the latest cell phones, laptops, and iPads, consultants are equipped with every technological means for conducting work efficiently and remotely. These technologies enable consultants to be accessible anywhere in the world, at any time of day. One gift I received when my division made our numbers for the year was a fancy and expensive international time clock—a gift I felt alluded to impending international travel (turned out I was right.)

Beyond money and technology, there are a host of others ways being a professional management consultant is rewarded materially. One consultant told me she was flown on client corporate jets to and from her project site. I mentioned previously a trip my project team took to the Bahamas. I also have been treated to spa visits, fancy dinners in top NYC restaurant wine cellars, access to exclusive dance clubs, limousine travel, first-class airline travel, discounted gym memberships, the financial means to live in a beautiful brownstone off of scenic Prospect Park, and free travel to almost any destination. Several firms had the policy that if you were staffed out of town, you could exchange your airline ticket home for the weekend for travel to any comparably priced destination. But, I rarely had time to enjoy these things. In fact, back at that time, my partner and I had enough airline miles and hotel points to travel first-class and honeymoon for free for a week at Marriott resorts in Kauai and Maui.

However, I agree with Kipping (2011) that "firms have been able to construct an 'image' of professionalism and have used it both to make their consultants confident and to impress their clients" (p. 532), which is made all the more seductive through material rewards. Perhaps because of these material rewards (in combination with other factors, of course), I did feel part of an elite profession and, as I mentioned in the preface, became very cognizant of embodying management consulting professionalism. What also needs to be addressed, though, are the personal motivations and aspirations that may not be tied to profit motives.

Most consultants agreed that the financial rewards of management consulting work help make the intensity of work worthwhile. But, interestingly, the material rewards of management consulting professionalism rarely have to do with the material project outcomes. There is rarely the sense of completion. Several consultants' feelings about this are indicative of the following quote: "you don't get to see things to completion. You don't get to see the value of it. That's one of the challenges. You don't necessarily get to see the fruit of your labor." One of the interpretations of this could point to a strategic Marxist worker expropriation or a cultivated entrepreneurial striving on the part of the consulting industry owners/partners. But, the nature of this line of work also aligns with becoming processes. The project of work identification is never finished off and is subject to intricate webs of meaning that overlap with previous projects and future projects—or, in other words, series of actions upon actions. The reward is not a fixed, finished product, but the process of becoming within the project.

Time and Space Constraints

Time and space constraints associated with management consulting work also contribute pressure to be professional. Orientation programs, client engagements, and the nature of corporate travel influence becoming processes of professionalism.

Once hired, consultants tend to undergo an intensive training and orientation program. These programs create a spatial seclusion that enables professional norms to be communicated and assimilated by consultants quickly and thoroughly. A former consultant remembers:

> A lot of it [setting expectations for professionalism] is done through the training right at the beginning. At [management consulting firm], it was three weeks at the office and then three weeks out at their campus. That was six weeks of "here, this is how you need to live". That time you will be in suits. It was a boot camp to get you in the proper

> mindset […] It's kinda like "you are going to conform to our way." And, one way they do that is by controlling the environment you're in.

This initial organizational training is important for instilling the corporate aesthetic whereby the consultant becomes transformed into an embodied corporate achievement. After six weeks of training, social interaction, professional networking, and having little time for communicating with outside friends and family members, this consultant had little choice in adopting (consciously or unconsciously) the professionalism expectations of the firm.

A heavy emphasis is placed on developing strong relationships with your "start group"—the cohort of new hires going through training together. In addition to the spatial seclusion at the training campus, nightly social activities provide fertile ground for concertive control and socialization. For example, during the first week of my orientation training in New York, my start group spent time with various office executives at dinners around town. At these social gatherings, our start group heard stories about successful consultants and observed professional tones and comportment in senior executives. We would talk among ourselves in the taxi cab rides back home and discuss what we found inspiring and exciting about moving into a career in consulting and how attractive and "pulled together" the executives were that we met. We reveled in the investment the firm was making in our entertainment and introduction to the firm through glamorous outings, but by the end of the week we also began to talk about the exhaustion we felt from the pressure to always "be on" during these social events. But, the time and space we spent together during those initial weeks created a relationship between us that continued long after we went our separate ways within the firm.

The nature of project work also imposes time and space constraints on consultants. For example, one consultant remarked, "I was working in Philadelphia for two years and by the time I got back to Chicago, I didn't have a life anymore." Fluctuating schedules, temporary assignments, quick deliverable turnarounds, long hours, and team-based project structures control the professional consultant's life. As I have mentioned previously, consultants spend a significant amount of time on planes, in airports, in rental cars, and in hotels. On some longer-term assignments, the firm sets up corporate housing for consultants. In my experience, this means sharing an apartment with one of your colleagues. There is very little privacy, although due to the long hours on client sites, consultants do not spend a great deal of time in corporate apartments.

These demands on consultant time and long periods of time spent traveling and working away from home affect social relationships. The following intimate reflection by a current consultant points to the complex intersections of time, space, and relationships endemic to management consulting professionalism.

> Most of my friends that I hang out with are the ones that I knew before I got into consulting. When I hang out with other consultants, it's either because we're all traveling together and we're driving to dinner together, or, it's organized happy hours with a meeting notice coming out [...] It's almost like your social settings are still organized in a professional manner […] But, I would say, even as it's impacted my social life outside with friends I had before I got into consulting, I really can't do much during week. So, pretty much any activity that comes up in the week, I'm out. The one friend I can talk about, "oh, this can be a tough schedule or this can be tough for me to work out," is the friend who also is in consulting. Because he understands how busy, what the expectations are, how frequently I'm going to be on the road. So, it's kind of a Catch 22, right? You want to have people who understand your life and what you do, but other consultants are also least likely to have time in their schedule to match up with you so you can hang out with them socially. But also, they're more likely to be the ones that, unless you knew them before, they'll be the ones who'll be very professional, as well. Luckily I knew this guy in college, we were both just undergrads. I think we developed that relationship before we got into consulting. I think if I met him now, and I said, "hey, I'm with [name left out]" and "I'm [name left out] with [name left out]," there would be that "oh, we're both in consulting—we need to act professional."

Social relationships are scheduled and bounded by the nature of management consulting work. While recognizing consultants as needing "human relations" outside of project demands, these social interactions are often fabricated in ways and means that benefit organizational social networking and team morale, rather than personal relational needs. There is also the sense that the professionalism demanded from time and space constraints impacts a consultant's ability to form new, genuinely intimate relationships. As the consultant suggests, meeting a potential friend in consulting means that a certain level of professionalism will always mediate that relationship.

Management consulting work relies on positive reputations and strong client relationships. As such, time is a mediating force in constructions of professionalism. From a client-perspective, time is important to professionalism because the value of long-term relationships supersedes the potential short-term gains of lapses in integrity. Professionalism, as a method through which client relationships are formed and maintained, serves a mediating role in decision-making related to integrity. One consultant claims, "a lot of people will try to push the limits to see how much they can get away with, but that is the degradation of professionalism." The potential and promise of working with the client in the future incites consultants to become professional.

Implications

Management consultants are asked to become professional through a variety of external forces: clients, colleagues, firm evaluations, material rewards, and time and space constraints. Importantly, these forces can affect *both* pain *and* pleasure. Professionalism, as an organizing technology, makes use of these mechanisms in order to construct particular professional identities:

> The power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another. It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within a system of formal equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences. (Foucault, 1977, p. 184)

In establishing resources for becoming professional (e.g., executives to emulate, evaluations to inform, space to observe and conform), firms are able to develop a professional aesthetic. Through differential embodiment of professionalism (e.g., women versus men, junior consultants versus executives), the gradations inform, measure, and teach normative expectations.

As Foucault (1977) notes, “discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)” (p. 138). Yet, given the power/knowledge framework outlined in Chapter Three, this is a unilateral view of docile bodies warranting complication. The ways in which people are invited to be disciplined cannot be extricated from teleological influences and the other components of self care. I also would add that it is impossible to judge the affective capacity of disciplining forces. While Foucault renders the enhancement of a body’s force limited to economic terms in this quote, we will see in the telos section that not all desires and aspirations upon which modes of subjection operate are tied to economic means. Before getting there, though, I first would like to explore the matter and substance upon which the disciplining forces of this section are acting.

Ethical Substance

Ethical substance includes the parts of the self upon which self-forming activities and modes of subjectivation act. Foucault (1997) asks, “what is the aspect or part of myself or my behavior which is concerned with moral conduct?” (p. 263). In the case of management consultants, professionalism acts upon the body, values, communication style, and mindset.

Body

I previously highlighted some of the ways in which professionalism defines dress, vocal tones, and bodily comportment. But, it is more than just the superficial outerwear of dress and body language that is affected by management consulting professionalism. Professionalism can cultivate an embodied homogeneity. One former consultant describes the value of professionalism in crafting a type of replicable firm mold:

> The first place I worked management consulting for, they were trying to create a mold. That when somebody said, "this person works for Company A," no matter who it was, they were always going to act and behave in the same way. It was very much—their product was their people and you wanted everyone to act and behave in the same way. When someone hires them, you knew exactly what they were going to get. We were the product and they had to be able to control what that product looked like. They were like Apple. They have to make sure that everything that goes into that iPhone they have control over. If you have control over it, nothing is going to mess it up. If you put an app on that iPhone, they have to have control over it. Make sure it doesn't ruin anything else. And, they have to control everything because their product is these consultants. So, one idiot can bring down the house. They plug one person out and put in another and they would act the same way. That's not even a hidden agenda. I thought I remember that being called out—that's just the way they wanted it to be. The whole thing—they were trying to do that on purpose.

It is in this same spirit that a consultant declared, "you can pick out a former consultant anywhere." Professionalism etches particular bodily comportments, communication styles, mindsets, and values into the bodies and attendant mannerisms of consultants.

Foucault (1977, 1980) wrote extensively about the body as a site of power. He was specifically interested in the effects of power on the body. In a well-known passage, Foucault (1977) writes:

> But the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use […] its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection […] the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. (pp. 25-26)

As this passage suggests, the effects of power on the body are not simply repressive, but also productive. Power "produces effects at the level of desire—and also at the level of knowledge" (Foucault, 1980, p. 59). Through a genealogical analysis of the conditions through which power and knowledge is deployed, Foucault (1980a) identifies the "perpetual spirals of power and pleasure" (p. 45) that exist within the complex intermingling of power, knowledge, resistance, and pleasure—often at the site of the body. The body is constituted within a broader field of discursive and political forces, which shape, normalize and condition individuals into docile bodies (Foucault, 1977).

As an example of the simultaneously pleasurable and repressive work professionalism enacts on the body, I can point to my fingernails. As a professional management consultant, my body was expected to be groomed and polished. Part of these expectations, as a woman, included having presentable fingernails. Most of the women with whom I worked scheduled regular manicures and this soon became part of my routine, as well. During my time in my PhD program, I purposefully have tried to "shake" some of my professionally disciplined habits. I try not to hold back on laughing and I tend to avoid doing anything with my nails. It took a lot of willpower, but I even showed up for school in shorts one day. But, an interesting thing happened when I started conducting interviews with management consultants for this project. I scheduled my first interview to meet at a coffee shop with a current consultant. On the day of the interview I found myself slightly panicked because I realized that my fingernails weren't "done." I actually wondered whether or not this consultant would make judgments about my failure to conform with embodied professionalism standards—and, whether or not this would influence my credibility. I share this story because I do believe management consulting significantly marks the body and mindset of consultants in ways that are not always visible.

Women's bodies, in general, present challenges for embodying management consulting professionalism (Holmer-Nadesan & Trethewey, 2000; Trethewey, 1999; Trethewey, 2001). "Women managers have been required to present a more desexualized persona, so as not to call attention to their embodied difference" (Wolkowitz, 2006, p. 90). As female consultants have noted in their comments in other sections, becoming professional bodies as women involves choosing particular clothes to mask the body (e.g., muted colors, nothing "too sexy"). Yet, as several female consultants affirmed, knowing exactly what constitutes the professional female body is difficult to ascertain. A skirt on one woman looks professional, yet on another woman, it looks too sexy. From consultant accounts, body type, age, and bodily comportment are "differences that make a difference" in embodied professionalism.

Yet, sometimes in management consulting work, there are particular people who are allowed to embody unprofessionalism, which alludes to the political and discursive construction of professionalism. Remember the story about the consultant fired for smoking at the client site? Whereas failure to conform to professionalism expectations resulted in getting fired for *that* consultant, the same executive chalks up *this* consultant's lack of embodied professionalism to "style":

> He was very blunt in his communication where he is more willing than most to be provocative in his assessment of his clients' business and his assessment of his clients' options. He had longer hair than most. He has probably, ah, personally, he's a bigger man and he blusters into a room and is loud [...] I don't think this is as much a difference in professionalism as it is in style. An individual who just decided they're not going to play by somebody else's rules.

Insensitive communication style, long hair, and undisciplined body are coded as unprofessional in this account, but for unknown reasons are justified in this particular consultant's case and recoded as style. Perhaps this consultant was a "whiz kid" or industry expert important to a particular project's success? However, it helps demonstrate that the attributes, behaviors, and norms often associated with professionalism are discursively constructed in the interests of the firm/occupation. The naturalization and codification of professionalism in management consulting work masks its taken-for-granted, yet highly contingent nature. When professionalism, or lack of professionalism, is invoked, it privileges certain interests over others.

It also points to the way in which professionalism marks the consultant as the communicative expression of professionalism—making the body the message (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007).

Aesthetic labor theorists have written extensively about the recruiting and sale of embodied organizational aesthetics in contemporary service corporations (Warhurst & Nickson, 2009; Witz, Warhurst, & Nickson, 2003; Wolkowitz, 2006). The body becomes the substance upon which an organizational aesthetic can be applied, marketed, and sold to consumers. This theorization of the body has important implications for thinking about the organizing ethic of professionalism in occupations. In Chapter Five, I discuss potential intersections between management consulting professionalism, aesthetic labor, and Ashcraft's (2013) glass slipper metaphor for occupational segregation.

Values

Although management consultants come into firms with established personal and professional value systems gained through life experience, family upbringing, and so forth, management consulting professionalism drives certain values to the forefront of consultant lives. Current and former consultant narratives suggest the values most notably worked upon by professionalism include: integrity, courage, and respect for Others.

Professionalism encourages integrity. One consulting executive was adamant that being a professional meant that "for no client, no peer will I sacrifice my integrity." Although news media accounts of insider trading and creative accounting suggest that the management consulting industry's drive for utilization, client contracts, and profitability lead to unethical values and behaviors, this was not the case in the stories I heard from current and former management consultants. In the following story, a consultant gives an example of the long-term benefits to honesty and engaged conflict resolution within client engagements:

> We were two weeks into the project and the company we had agreed with didn't uphold any parts of the contract for us to be able to meet our deadline. And, so it turned out to be a really difficult situation. And, it was a very large client for us. And, I called our president here, whom I have a great deal of respect for and I said, "got a problem. I can see we're not going to deliver on this. It's turned into a problem. It's going to be difficult in the end. And, I think we need to have the conversation with the client now. And, I think, honestly, that the course of action is for us to say, we've worked two weeks, this is how much we would charge you if it was T&M—time and materials. And, let's just walk away. Because you're not going to get what you want out of it." In that particular case, because of the relationship we had with the client and the relationship I had established with the person who initiated the particular project, that's indeed what happened. They came back to us and said, "you're right. We didn't fulfill our end of the bargain. You're right, we're not ready to do this project right now. And, there's no reason for us to wait eight weeks until the end of this work. And so, let's cut our losses."

In this case, personal values bump up against firm financial goals and the consultant is forced to make choices about how to proceed. Rather than continue down a path leading to the failure of project objectives and the client paying a lot of money, the consultant renegotiated the terms of the contract—in this case, ending the project, for the sake of doing what she felt was "the right thing to do for the client."

Another current consultant spoke about a project in which his analysis of the organization's situation ended up getting the president of the division (who had hired him) fired. It wasn't the outcome the consultant wanted, but because the president was part of the problem and the organization had previously looked the other way, the consultant took the responsibility of bringing forth what could be considered an unpopular message. As the consultant explained, "to solve the problem for which they hired me, there was nothing I could do for them with him [the division president] in that role." Delivering this kind of bad news requires courage because consultants often have developed strong relationships with clients and it becomes difficult to say "no" to their requests and demands.

In some instances, this integrity and courage could cost the consulting firm potential clients. But, becoming professional as a consultant involves engaging in difficult conversations that challenge these very values. It is only through these types of conversations and situations that consultants can put into practice the integrity and courage associated with being a professional. One consulting executive offers an example one such situation he encountered:

> We had a big customer service project that we were proposing to a large natural gas utility and their service organization was suffering. We fundamentally disagreed with the way they were thinking about the problem. We challenged their assumptions and created a proposal to turn around their thinking. We went out on a limb by telling them that "the way you are thinking about this is wrong. Yes, you've asked us to present a solution to A, but we think you need to think about B." We risked losing the business by doing that.

Instead of presenting what the client wanted to hear, this consultant's firm moved forward with a proposal that reflected a commitment to honesty and, quite simply, doing the "right" thing according to the information the group had at the time. I am interested, however, in exploring in more detail the ways in which these values are rewarded by the firm. Had the consultant lost the business, how would the value of integrity and courage engendered by professionalism change?

There are no codified set of values to which all management consultants adhere. Several consultants at one firm referenced a firm-wide code of conduct, which outlines professional values. One consultant said some business schools are offering a code of conduct that MBAs can sign up for now. Yet, completion of certification programs, more specifically and as discussed in Chapter Two, is not a requirement to become a professional management consultant. As a former engineer, this consultant compared the certifications of consultants to engineers:

> There are a number of certifications that civil and mechanical engineers have to take on to be seen as reputable and to progress in their careers. But, this is not so for software engineers or some of the younger fields of technology that are growing fast. [In consulting] there are some technical areas where people go out and get certifications, but I feel even if there was a certification for a certified management consultant, it would be interesting to see if clients would pay a premium for a consultant that has that certification versus a consultant with a proven track record with peer companies in that sector. That's a topic worth debating.

From this quote, there is the sense that in management consulting work, proven action is more valuable to clients than certified values. Or, in other words, no certification or training program could make up for proven action and accomplishment "on the job" when clients seek a professional consultant.

After working for his management consulting firm for 10 years, one consultant left, in part, due to his frustration over a cultivated mindset of "we're better than them" in terms of client relationships. In the following account, the consultant expresses this "us versus them" value that was engrained in professionalism expectations at his previous firm. Based on his experiences of the detrimental effects of that professional value, he purposefully cultivated an alternative professional value of client respect at his new firm:

> It bothered me that the project teams that we assembled typically had an air of "we are so much smarter than the client." That bothered me because we were between 20 and 30 years old with limited experience. Definitely smart people—but, we didn't have the respect and perspective of the client that we needed to have. And, we didn't have leaders around us to help us understand that. So, it perpetuated and grew and became the norm. To me, that's unprofessionalism.

As will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Five, the perpetuation of an "us versus them" value system hinders the capacity for creating loving institutions and powerful affect. The consultant points to an important method for positive collective action—treating Others with respect.

Communication Style

Professionalism impacts management consultants' communication style in myriad fashions. More specifically, becoming a professional management consultant involves exhibiting proficiency in a particular occupational jargon, developing savvy interpersonal skills, and cultivating emotional intelligence.

The use of language such as, "deliverables" and "utilization rate" connote promise, urgency, and material results. One consulting executive suggested that "benchmarks," "best practices," and consultant anecdotes help clients make sense of and navigate the challenges of organizational changes. The use of fact-based jargon "helps navigate internal politics." Another current executive organizes her day using some of this occupational-specific language:

> My day is driven by *metrics*—the things I'm expected to perform as part of my commitment to the organization. And, my commitment can be broken down into 3 areas: one is continuing to capture and maintain *intellectual capital*. Mentoring *junior resources*. And, then part of that is just plain *utilization* and helping clients with whatever solutions. And, my day is usually split, honestly, between those 3 things. (emphasis added)

As language defines how we make sense of the world around us, the action-orientation and hierarchical denotation of terms "intellectual capital," "junior resources," and "utilization" may provide insights into what is important in the construction of professionalism in management consulting. Other consulting jargon, such as, "best practices," suggests for one consultant "they've been passed down generation to generation as things that have proven successful." This affects consultant perceptions of perceived capability to challenge taken-for-granted ways of doing things.

It is not just the terms that contribute to management consulting professionalism, but also the modulated tone with which these words are communicated. A friend from college (not a consultant) remarked to me at one point that one of our joint friends (a consultant) "sounded funny." After not seeing him for several years, my friend was surprised by the professional tone and language he used at our very laid-back and casual reunion. This points to the ways in which language and tone contribute to an overall aesthetic style of professionalism and can pervade the traditional professional boundaries of work contexts.

Management consulting professionalism encourages *both* rationality *and* passion in communication styles. For example, a current consultant spoke about how a professional communication style improved his relationship with his wife and friends: “I look at disagreements with family and friends in a different way—approaching disagreements or problems in personal life with a structured, consulting approach.” This rational style in not only helpful for conflict resolution, but it is also helpful for those consultants who are not as comfortable with social networking, more generally. As one former consultant reasons:

> The experience of being a consultant has made it easier for me in social situations to do a better job of being a participant. I put on my consultant hat and charge forward and talk to people […] I don’t think I’m naturally the best networker—I don’t really do it—but, I know it’s valuable and worthwhile and my consulting skill set has helped me do that even though it’s not necessarily where I would normally go from a personal preference.

This professional communication style can be difficult to cultivate. As one former consultant proclaims: “I’ve sat through presentations watching the partner deliver a presentation and being in awe—there’s a certain element of that that I’m fully convinced that you are born with.” So, while rationality is a component of professional communication style, it is also inseparable from passion—whether innate or trained.

Consultants become professional through the development of strong interpersonal communication skills, with an emphasis on establishing credibility, trust, and sociability quickly. Part of consulting relationships depends upon winning approval and buy-in. This necessitates being able to “read people” in order to develop intimacy, connection, and familiarity with new people. “What’s their personality? What gets them excited? What gets them excited to show work products? What gets them riled up and aggravated?” A consultant tells the following story about how she was encouraged through client feedback to work on her emotional intelligence and corresponding interpersonal skills:

> One of my clients when I was at [firm] had given feedback that I was almost too cold. I was doing customer interviews for a consumer insights case. The funny part was that somebody before me had done some similar interviews so I had seen the results. And, seen the responses. And I was getting similar responses. So, people would tell jokes, but I had already heard their funny answers. So, I wasn't being familiar enough. They were like, "gosh, is she not human because she's not laughing at our jokes?" But, I literally got that feedback. So, I was like, "okay, I didn't get the balance right." I was trying to be too matter of fact—professional—and, I didn't take enough time out to be familiar enough so people could build trust. I needed to balance being more—that balance between letting people know you are human and you're not such a square, that they can kind of relate to you, but also having that kind of professional attitude.

Part of becoming a professional management consultant involves learning how to read people and determining appropriate interpersonal communication strategies for expressing *both* cool, objective rationality *and* warm, engaging intimacy. Imbalances to this equation are coded as unprofessional—whether by clients or colleagues.

Consultants without innate or learned professional communication competencies are encouraged and provided opportunities (sometimes involuntarily) to develop professionalism. One former consultant expressed her resistance to the professional training imposed upon her by judgments made by more senior members of the firm:

> When I was up for manager, I was told I needed more polish—well, I think you can tell I have a sense of humor. No, it wasn't more polish—it was "more seasoning," they said. My response to the person who gave me that was: "More salt, pepper, garlic, what?" That was the most useless, and I told the guy that, that was the most useless piece of feedback I've ever received in my life […] They're looking for somebody who can think on their feet—I think is the most professional skill you can have. What would happen is—to help me with the seasoning—they would work out how a sales pitch would go and we'd have it done to a T, then the senior manager would purposefully not show up and they would go "Ok, it's all you." Which happened several times in my training. So, the one thing I can do now is think on my feet. It's not the way you want to learn, though. Apparently they thought it was.

While she expressed gratitude for the development of a communication style that has served her well in a new professional context, she also points to the challenges of this kind of training technique. Once again, the ambiguity of professionalism is evident through executive coding of the consultant's communication style as needing "more seasoning." This is a characterization that connotes her gender and youth, yet provides little specificity on how to become more professional in this context.

But, at the same time, there is a tension between *both* being seen (strategically establishing self and expertise) *and* not bringing attention to self (muting presence through dress and vocal tones, so as not to disturb the environment). In the previous anecdote, the consultant's communication style serves as a focal point for professional development. In the following story, the consultant's communication style serves as a backdrop for professionalism:

> In a group meeting situation, especially with senior leadership there, as a consultant, you often nod your head, you agree, you are not so overt in disagreeing—you more maneuver the conversation. But, being on the client side now, I've had to learn how to be more assertive and opinionated in an overt way as opposed to a nuanced way that you usually do as a consultant.

This former consultant's comment suggests that professionalism can become an archived, sedimented set of behaviors, patterns, and mindsets that stay with consultants, even after they leave the industry. As I mentioned in the preface, the professional communication style expected of me as a management consulting professional is different from the communication style expected of an academic.

For example, in communicating with my advisor about my progress in the PhD program, there were particular conventions of my communication style that remained from my understandings of management consulting professionalism. I provided regular emailed status updates in order to communicate goals, timeframes, and bulleted lists of "deliverables." These status reports also delineated deliverables into sections marked as "completed," "in progress," and "immediate next steps." This was a format I used to report on my weekly activities for many of my consulting engagements. I am thankful that my advisor was familiar with management consulting communication styles, as my messages could have been interpreted as another language. However, I did find that the concept of a status report was unfamiliar to several of my graduate colleagues.

Mindset

A professional mindset is cultivated by management consulting professionalism, but is also conditioned by anticipatory socialization processes. A consulting recruiter once informed me that my upbringing as an "Army brat" would be compelling to the consulting industry. As my father was a military police officer, it suggested three things. First, that I likely was raised in a disciplined household—one that appreciated structure and routines, and endorsed a respect for authority. Second, that I probably had acquired a type of personal resiliency, given the regular relocations characteristic of military life. And, third, that I likely developed strong interpersonal communication skills from exposure to diverse personalities and learning to "read" people in new contexts. This early military socialization in all probability would provide a fertile (and, unresisting) ground for further developing a professional management consultant mindset.

While the modes of subjectivation discussed previously offer insights into the sometimes, top-down, coercive power relations that homogenize the workforce, we also consent to an ethic of professionalism to "work on us," and even take great pleasures in the ways in which a professional orientation to the world shapes and changes us. Although a professional mindset is often difficult to sustain, consulting firms often reward actions that reflect a professional orientation to life as a consultant.

For example, at a certain point in my consulting career, I wanted to start a family. At the end of one project, I was told that I would likely be heading to Switzerland for my next project. As I had planned to become pregnant after the completion of my current project, I began reflecting upon how pregnancy+woman+consultant+international project would impact my ability to remain professional and successful. What if my morning sickness prevented me from participating equally with my teammates? How would my "well checkups" impact my travel schedule—would I cost the firm/project extra expense for trips back to the United States? I requested a transfer from the high-travel and intense workload of the brand management practice to the managed markets practice—known within the firm for its relatively low travel at the time. My actions in regards to handling my pregnancy were praised by a senior member of the firm and thus reinforced a disciplined professional mindset by encouraging me to feel I had "done the right thing."

A former consultant told a related story about her decision to start a family:

> I remember asking a partner when is a good time to have a baby. And they had said, "well, I did the financial analysis of it." I was like, "wait. Stop there." And they had said "with good help, you can have a baby whenever you want. And, there's no good time to have a baby." And, every partner I asked said, "Oh, we have good help. Oh, we have good help. Oh, we have good help." So, it told me that if I really wanted to be a hands-on mom, then I couldn't be in management consulting. That's exactly what happened. It's all-encompassing. Especially the professionalism aspect of it.

The worldview that is crafted is one in which only the professional self can exist within discourses of work and family. As Wolkowitz (2006) contends:

> Demanding employment is usually still organized around the lifestyle of a male worker without day-to-day caring responsibilities—even if the worker is now female. The routines of professional life make little room for pregnancy or the nursing mother (p. 92).

As brought forth in the preface, there is organizational benefit to fixing professional identities as it creates a particular mindset and corresponding actions.

The same consultant asserts "I shouldn't be having conversations in HR about how to FedEx your milk back home." The professional mindset can pose significant barriers for women and men in consulting. Firms still grapple with work-life balance policies, particularly promotion policies and consulting lifestyle adaptations for working mothers. Deloitte Consulting, long heralded by *Working Mother* magazine as one of the best places to work, provides continuing education programs, flexible work arrangements, and women's networking initiatives. However, as one former consultant maintains, it is difficult to put into practice the values these programs are designed to promote. Motherhood remains a powerful barrier to women's advancement in management consulting firms.

Yet, on the other hand, to complicate this portrayal, another consultant argued a professional mindset keeps integrity front and center for consultants. "A professional mindset is not having to worry about covering up lies, gray areas. My clients and colleagues don't have to worry about that. There's trust." Professionalism in this sense creates a mindset of truthfulness and integrity that many consultants feel is critical to successful management consulting work. As one consulting executive explained:

> One of the foundational components of management consulting professionalism is courage. Low self-orientation, courage, and integrity creates a foundation of trust. It's hard. The problem with being truthful is that it forces you to have difficult conversations. It's hard to tell somebody the truth that they don't have the skills needed to do the job. It's hard to tell a client you don't agree with some of the decisions they're making or the direction they're heading. Those are unpleasant things that you have to deal with if you are handling yourself in a professional manner.

A professional mindset, once again, is taxing in practice. However, when combined with values, such as integrity and courage, it provides a sort of armor consultants can adorn themselves with in order to face and deal with "unpleasant" situations and difficult conversations with both clients and colleagues.

Implications

The "care of the self" is negotiated in/through actions, beliefs, and attitudes as constructed and interpreted within a variety of discourses about what it means to be a professional management consultant. This results in a particular mindset and embodied orientation to the world. But, mind and body, as mutually constitutive substances of self, are not separate. This conceptualization enables organizational researchers to recast understandings of professional services work as embodied knowledge work. *Both* the mind *and* the body are worked over by professionalism.

A "life as a work of art" approach to self complicates scholarship only focused on "looking good and sounding right" (Warhurst & Nickson, 2001)—the aesthetic style of professional services work. Core ethical substances have been altered (body, values, communication style, and mindset) in consultants through various self-forming and external forms of subjection. But, there remains one last puzzle piece in the becoming activities of professional consultants that is inextricable from these dimensions: telos.

Telos

As I have foreshadowed in previous sections, the becoming activities of a professional management consultant are shaped by a variety of teleologies, not all associated with money and prestige. Foucault's (1997) question, "which is the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way?" (p. 265), helps contextualize the self-forming and mode of subjectivation work on the consultant's ethical substance. An important contribution of the application of this question in management studies is the apparent joy, pleasure, and fulfillment management consultants gain in their lives from consulting experiences and relationships. Three themes emerged from my interviews regarding what consultants gain from management consulting professionalism: partnerships, control, and being a part of something bigger.

Partnerships

Fundamentally, consultants strive to understand “who is my client?” Embedded in this question is an assumption of difference—which, as will be discussed in Chapter Five, is foundational to political love. Professionalism provokes and sustains an orientation to an Other. In order to come together as equals and create productive partnerships, several consultants made the case that professionalism provided a toolkit for chameleon-like adaptations. Professionalism assists with establishing a presence and connection with an Other without significantly disrupting the environment. From there, consultants can shift and adapt as needed within a client relationship. Professionalism thus ensures both the client and the consultant retain their singularity, but are able to come together to create something new.

Several similar consultant comments are reflected in the following: “you are there not because you are faster or smarter, but because you are objective and clients require someone from the outside so that it is easier to digest what you’re helping them to solve.” Most of the consultants with whom I spoke recognized that they are brought in to share understandings of how the industry more broadly solves particular organizational challenges. In fact, one consultant mentioned that the client “understands the problem better because they live with it. For every problem a consultant solves, there are 30 others they solved on their own.” As such, consultants aspire to help and be useful in finding solutions to business problems. This respect for the Other (the client) is critical to professional partnerships.

These client-consultant partnerships are sometimes, but not always, long-lasting. One former consultant relayed the following story about one of his early project teams:

> I think it was last year that it had been 10 years since the system went up and some of the folks who helped implement the system both on the client side and the consulting side got together and they invited me for drinks. That was 10 years later. That was pretty

> incredible. You know, people do make connections because the other thing is that you spend in many of these projects a very intense—you spend a lot of hours with these folks.

In this case, a productive client partnership brought back feelings of joy, gratitude, and respect. These kinds of professional relationships have staying power and enhance the life force of all involved. Even after 10 years, the project work this consultant performed continued to affect the client organization and the people with whom he worked in positive ways.

There is a lot of excitement generated from the challenges of consulting work, including the lifestyle and variety of people with whom you have the opportunity to work. This can be really fun, too:

> Now, if the project scope is on target […] then it's really just about building a relationship with the client. And, you're able to develop a solution and a solution mindset, and everyone has a common goal. That's when it's really fun!

Many consultants spoke about the enjoyment they felt about the learning environment and opportunities to work across industries and functional areas. One current consultant sums it up best: "I feel pretty thankful that I'm able to get this terrific experience." Through intellectual stimulation, challenging interpersonal communication situations, and professional relationship development, management consultants can experience great joy and pleasure from client partnerships.

On one of my projects, each of our roles were matched up to a client counterpart. I became very close with my communication counterpart. We regularly had lunch together and met to brainstorm project communication materials. While a positive relationship was part of my professional responsibilities, the intimacy that developed between us provided a great deal of comfort and enjoyment to my work day. Although we did not keep in touch for very long after the end of that project, I still remember that she really wanted to buy a convertible VW bug and the family stories she told to that end. I did not experience this level of intimacy and care for any of my subsequent clients, but the known possibility of such partnerships left open the potential for such professional relationships in my later projects.

Control

Management consulting work is precarious and stressful given the competition for projects and assignments, high annual turnover rates, selective partnership classes, and the everyday pressure of managing client relationships. So, it is perhaps little wonder that several consultants, former and current, expressed delight in the structure, protocol, hierarchy, work plans, and deliverables inherent to management consulting work. One consultant remarked, "one of the things I enjoyed about consulting was that it was always well-defined."

Consultants expressed remorse and sadness when client projects fail to meet objectives in some way. Professionalism helps circumvent these feelings and "the potential for beating yourself up." One current consultant elaborated on how knowing you acted in a professional manner can help "rationalize" when things don't work out as intended:

> At the time, with all the information we had, that was the best decision we could make. We worked with the client and went down that path. And, if it didn't work, then, hey, we all thought it was the best thing to do. So, therefore, that's just life sometimes. Then you figure out why and you learn from it.

Becoming professional is one way to avoid the fear of failure. One consultant says professionalism helps "when you know that there are multi-million dollar deals always on the line—there's a lot of pressure not to mess that up." Professionalism provides a control of the self that feels good. Being a "jack of all trades," establishing financial security, developing a strong reputation for self and firm, and being able to "read" people offer a sense of grounding and stability in an otherwise chaotic environment.

Consultants also face the tensions of *both* not wanting to be fired and being needed for the next phase of work (irrepaceability) *and* achieving a certain level of impact and change that they are no longer needed (replaceability). For one current consultant, success means that she should be able to be replaced. She argues, “if you want to lead, then you have to let go of that responsibility of always being the point person. You won’t be able to transfer knowledge if you enjoy what you do so much that you can’t let go or if the pressures of your work are too great.” Acceptance of these tensions related to use-value is part of the becoming process of management consulting professionalism.

Being a Part of Something Bigger

Becoming professional for consultants in this study involves being a part of something bigger, both literally and symbolically. From a literal perspective, professionalism enables consultants to establish and remain connected to a larger social network. “If I go to a business event where there’s people of Vice-Presidents, Presidents, CFOs there, I feel like I can easily interact with them, not embarrass myself, maybe make a strong impression, build a valuable addition to my personal network.” Although this type of social capital is instrumental to neoliberal entrepreneurialism and self-branding, there is also an element to social networking that offers intrinsic satisfaction from being part of a broader social system—part of relationships outside of the self. The importance of this sense of community is also apparent from a client engagement perspective, as one consultant argues—“you’ve got a lifeline. If you need help with something, let me know.” Being a part of a bigger professional network provides support and resources important to the professional consultant.

But, the desire to be part of something bigger also creates disappointment. Most consulting work is “behind the scenes,” yet highly visible and influential to people’s everyday lives. As one consultant commented:

> You don't really own anything—it is for the benefit of the client or firm. It is not a business where I developed this and my name is stamped on it. Not having a sense of ownership can get frustrating when you want to be tied to the mission of something.

Professionalism in this situation requires the consultant to contribute as part of a larger collective, but remain invisible as an active participant. Sometimes consultants see the product of their labor, but oftentimes they do not. Some projects articulate a strategy and design for a project, but do not enable consultants to see those designs executed and in operation.

Being a part of something bigger symbolically also provides motivation to become a professional consultant and participate in an organized collective of people doing similarly impactful work. As one current consultant affirmed, the power of professionalism is not strictly tied to monetary aspects:

> Everyone likes to think they are doing good work. No matter what people say, true fulfillment comes from many more intangible areas than just the money you make. I think professionalism, even though the connection may not be as clear, professionalism makes you feel a part of something bigger—that there is a code of conduct, that there is a way of doing things. You have a certain sense of being a part of a group of people that are pursuing something bigger than just financial goals, bigger values than self or firm.

Through professionalism, consultants are incited to be a part of something bigger than the self. This has a powerful affective quality that points to the benefits of collective organizing. As people come together, as singular bodies with desires to be a part of something bigger, the collective potential for loving, positive action is amplified.

Implications

Spinoza (1996) defined love as joy with the idea of external cause. The pleasure and enjoyment found in consultant accounts of management consulting professionalism are evident in this section. From loving partnerships, comforts of control, and the enjoyment of being a part of something bigger than one's self, management consultants in this study point to the potential of joyful relationships and institutions, even within a neoliberal, capitalist enterprise. This means that organizational studies can no longer ignore the active, powerful potential of people working in corporations.

Analyses of control, subjectivity, and discipline are certainly part of the story, as indicated in the previous dimensions of self-ethic formation. However, that logic must be balanced with the passion, love, and capacity for powerful affect that these professional consultants hold in teleologies related to self becomings. Through partnerships, control, and being a part of something bigger, professionalism shapes consultant ideals and motivations, which then inform actions, decisions, and activities related to becoming professional.

Summary

The interdependencies of these becoming techniques highlight the intersections of power/knowledge dynamics. To this end, a *both-and* perspective signals their mutually constitutive nature. Knowledge about the self gained from self-forming activities and modes of subjectivation are created within particular D/discursive fields of possibilities, thus signaling a privileging of certain ways of seeing/being in the world over others. There is pleasure in *both* the constraints of the professionalism episteme (Adams, 2012) *and* resisting and redefining for the self the work of professionalism. The aims and exemplars of professionalism (telos) *both* reinforce *and* resist firm and societal D/discourses of professional subjectivity. Knowledge gained from observations of and participation in networks of power relations feed into *both* management consulting professional teleologies *and* inspired self-forming activities. Therefore, in thinking about becoming processes of self, the intersections of power/knowledge dynamics cannot be extricated from each other, given their mutually constitutive essence. As Foucault (1997) states, “we should not have to refer the creative activity of somebody to the kind of relation he has to himself, but should relate the kind of relation one has to oneself to a creative activity" (p. 262).

Figuring out the fundamental question driving this line of work, "who is my client," involves *both* rationality *and* passion. Spinoza (1996) advocates for this type of *both-and* attitude as he believed, "the path of wisdom and happiness is the enjoyment of intellectual activity and resides in the pleasure taken in the deployment of physical and mental power" (xv). Professionalism is an organizing technology for the constitution of a field of possibilities in which consultants make sense of self and Other. Professionalism, in this sense, could be analyzed as *both* bad *and* good. Professionalism demands certain bodies, comportments, attitudes, interactions, and aspirations. But, it also serves as a way for avoiding reaction and sustaining action. By learning how to manage the passions—avoiding destructive, negative reactions—professionalism ensures alignment with positive action and interaction. The acceptance of *both* the good *and* the bad cultivates an ethos of "life as a work of art."

The challenge, of course, is finding the balance between that which is positive—for example, the line between expressing loving care for persons at work (active, enhancing potential) and varying individual levels of comfort with these kinds of expressions outside of home/personal contexts—and, where the positive reverses resonance into the negative—for example, sexual harassment (reactive, negating potential). Through the development of emotional intelligence, interpersonal communication skills, and general "people" experience, management consultants apply personal judgments to determine the balance between the rationality and passion inherent to enacting and embodying management consulting professionalism. These complicated and shifting interpretations contribute to understandings of the nuanced activities involved in becoming a professional management consultant.

Through the four becoming activities presented in this section, there is the sense that there is an inherent overcoming of self, as situated within power/knowledge relations, that is critical to a professional client-orientation. In figuring out the question "who is my client?," both through intersubjective exchanges with clients/colleagues and self exploration/improvement, consultants employ symbolic and material resources in engaging in professional identity work. Would the question "who is my client?" that centers and drives the industry be any less relevant if the client-consultant exchange were not predicated on money? Perhaps, but this question fundamentally simplifies and stereotypes an occupational association with potential, power, knowledge, and trajectory as inextricable from capitalist expansion and profitability. Given the kaleidoscope of teleologies individual consultants shared about their occupational investments, care must be taken to not reify notions of the collective predicated on comparative assumptions of lack and exclusion. The next chapter explains this risk and provides practices for engaging the powerful potential of occupations through a focus on method, rather than attribute—or, in other words, the management consulting professional as action, rather than identity.

V. Love: Occupation as Method

"Love may be an angel, but if so it is an angel armed"

(Hardt & Negri, 2009)

I have examined how individuals engage in activities of becoming, which shape constructions of professional identities in particular ways. I now move into an exploration of the implications this localized work has from a more macro perspective of occupational identification and capacity for affect. One way to analyze the work being performed by consultants is through the aesthetic labor professionalism requires of consultants. Drawing upon the descriptions presented in previous sections regarding the selective recruiting practices, embodied professional aesthetic, and service-orientation of the management consulting industry, I employ the professional management consultant as a potential example of Ashcraft's (2013) glass slipper metaphor. While offering important insights into occupational segregation practices, I bring a *both-and* perspective to the theorization by also addressing the risks of such a metaphorical classification on the power-*potentia* of an occupational collective. Then, in light of the power/knowledge theoretical perspective presented in Chapter Three, I present the importance of organizational studies analyzing not only attributes, but also the methods of occupations as a means for cultivating loving institutions in our society.

Aesthetic Labor

Aesthetic labor is the materialization of organizational style in post-Fordist service economies whereby a particular embodied disposition is transformed into a skill and sold as a commodity to customers (Witz, Warhurst & Nickson, 2003). Although much of the aesthetic labor studies focus on the retail and hospitality industries, the conceptualization of aesthetic labor can be extended to professional services—or, knowledge work. While professionalism has been positioned as a discursive resource for organizational/occupational control and socialization (Fournier, 1999; Anderson-Gough, Grey & Robson, 1998), it has not been explored as an embodied skill sold as a commodity to clients of professional services firms. It could be argued that certain aesthetics related to bodily comportment, embodied interpersonal interactions, and broader social discourses and practices cohere around the notion of professionalism in organizing management consulting work.

Aesthetic Labor Background

Extant research on aesthetic labor explores embodied, commodified service interactions in a variety of industries, such as: fashion modeling (Wissinger, 2012), hospitality (Witz, Warhurst & Nickson, 2003; Warhurst & Nickson, 2009), entertainment (Dean, 2005), sexualized service work (Warhurst & Nickson, 2009), retail (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007; Williams & Connell, 2010), call centers (Nath, 2011), nail salons (Kang, 2010) and hair salons (Sheane, 2012). This work recognizes the interrelatedness of emotional labor and embodied display, as first theorized by Hochschild (1983). Yet, most critique the primacy Hochschild gives emotions over embodied displays. For many aesthetic labor theorists, mind and body are not separate. This conceptualization of aesthetic labor enables organizational researchers to recast understandings of professional services work as embodied knowledge work. Additionally, aesthetic labor, despite a scholarly focus on "looking good and sounding right" (Warhurst & Nickson, 2001), is not reducible to physical appearance because it is constituted within fields of social relationships (Witz, Warhurst & Nickson, 2003).

Through an analysis of the embodied effects of emotional labor, Witz, Warhurst, and Nickson (2003) argue that aesthetic labor represents a materialization of corporate style within employee bodies. Based on the narratives consultants told about expectations of management consulting professionalism, this notion could be extended to reflect a particular occupational style, as well. Particular dispositions are commodified through a complex process of "recruitment, selection and training, transforming them into 'skills' which are geared toward producing a 'style' of service encounter that appeals to the senses of the customer" (Witz, et al., p. 37). This work is important to management consulting, given the primacy of professionalism within the development and maintenance of client-consultant relationships.

The service workers in Witz, et al.'s (2003) analysis are molded into organizational commodities. The authors argue that organizations emphasize "the ways in which these individuals can present themselves through posture, gesture, use of personal space, facial characteristics, and eye contact" (p. 42). But, importantly, this employee branding begins prior to the employee engaging in her or his service work. As discussed in the anticipatory socialization and training sections of this study, the "right" kinds of professional management consultants are strategically recruited. Firm recruiting practices are particularly important because they suggest organizations are "mining and exploiting the product of social hierarchies […] looking for individuals who embody social privileges" (Williams & Connell, 2010, p. 352). After being hired, consultants engage in orientation and training activities designed to engrain a professional aesthetic.

Drawing attention to the politics of bodies at work means "although everybody has a body, not everyone has the same relation to its economic and symbolic significance" (Wolkowitz, 2006, p. 6). For example, Wolkowitz uses photographs from a variety of occupations to construct the argument that the intersections of particular bodies and work shape individuals' employment experiences and relationships. The human body is particularly emphasized in service work, as production and consumption of the service happens within the embodied interpersonal interaction (Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). Yet, gender, race, class, sexuality, age and other markers of difference differentially impact exchange value in today's service economy, a critique Wolkowitz levies against aesthetic labor theorists for not addressing more robustly.

For example, Kang (2010) found that "the exchange of body labor often blurs, conceals, and justifies inequalities in the workplace and poses a barrier to organizing" (p. 240). Based on her ethnographic study of New York nail salons, Kang argues race and immigration status shape perceived meanings and value of manicure services. For both Wolkowitz and Kang, the human body is central to how meanings are constructed at work, both in its form and in its relationship to labor processes. The worker's body, then, is not an arbitrary formation within a particular occupational domain, but a reflection of broader social relationships, economic structures, and political processes within a particular labor market.

If the becoming activities of professional management consultants are analyzed through this lens of aesthetic labor, then there is significant potential for certain bodies to be privileged over others. This differential access and involvement within this occupational line of work can affect the potential for human flourishing, as the power/knowledge of some bodies is preferred over that of other bodies. This is one potential collective effect of the organizing work of professionalism on consultant minds and bodies. Professionalism, as an embodied aesthetic style impacting consultants' mindsets and bodies, contributes to constructions of commodified professionals in a service economy.

Aesthetic Labor in Management Consulting Work

Professionalism plays an integral role in defining the work that is performed and how consultants embody that work, as argued in Chapter Two. As one consultant described management consulting: "[It is] an intangible product […] you trade on your reputation. Professionalism is the cost of entry for a consulting firm." The work performed by traditional management consultants varies, but centers around manufacturing value for the client both in the quality of the end product ("deliverables") and embodied professional interactions. A common theme among participant discussions in my study was the importance of professionalism in constructing client perceptions of consultant value. One consulting executive described the economic value of professionalism as:

> A source of competitive advantage in creating a distributed decision-making framework that allows you to know your team is going to be making the right decision. As technology evolves and forms of business organizing evolves—you know the notion of crowd sourcing and collective problem solving in geographically dispersed groups—I think the importance of professionalism is that much higher and can serve an economic purpose.

Thus, professionalism is cast as a commodity sold to clients. But, it is also an aesthetic that *both* marks management consultants broadly as an occupational collective *and* differentiates singular consultants and firms as a source of competitive advantage within the consulting marketplace.

In thinking about professionalism from the perspective of a client, one former consultant suggests that professionalism within a management consulting context:

> Minimizes that cognitive dissonance of "should I be paying $200 an hour for this person?" I could produce a spreadsheet or a piece of code or workflow, but if I stumble all over myself in describing what it is or how to use it, then it's…"this appears to be good work but you are just completely unpolished." Maybe $50 bucks an hour, but not $200.

Here, we get the sense that even if the output of actual work (e.g., a spreadsheet) is good, it does not command the same price as that same output delivered by a polished consultant. It is the polish and professionalism that commands a higher value from the clients' perspective. In terms of aesthetic labor, a disposition of professionalism is transformed into a marketable product.

Another consulting executive remembered a partner coming to speak to his start group during the first weeks of employment. The consultant remembered two parts of that talk on professionalism that have stuck with him over the years. The first was that you have to take your own personal education upon yourself. The second part was that you have to earn your hourly rate. So, "you must better yourself" in order to achieve the goal of "selling your personal brand"—professionalism, in this case. Interestingly, the same consultant noted that, in the current economic climate, he does not see the younger generation of consultants initiating this kind of entrepreneurial spirit: "I've seen more of a willingness to be led and be told what to do and not as much self-starting." Firm expectations for building an aesthetic style, such as professionalism, may inhibit creations of self outside of the normative embodied attributes of consulting professionalism.

Relatedly, one of the former consultants I spoke with currently serves in a position where he hires management consultants. In combining his consulting background with his current role as a client, he says:

> I don't just want the deliverables to be A-1, but I want the interactions between the consultants and my team members, consultants and me, consultants and my colleagues—I want that to be A-1, as well. And if I feel that it's not, if the technical skills are there but not the soft skills that make the complete package, then I'm going to have heartburn about the value I'm getting in terms of what I'm paying for it.

Professionalism becomes just as important as the work outputs—it adds value to the service and product. Professionalism is an embodied aesthetic for which clients are willing to pay top dollar.

The embodiment of professionalism manifests in a variety of material forms. One former consultant talked about the arbitrary codes of professionalism that cohere around professional attire at her management consulting firm. In this instance, we get a sense of how aesthetic labor transcends face-to-face client interactions. As we learned in the previous chapter through the story about the consultant only being able to loosen his tie, not take it off, even late at night at the firm office, with no clients present, aesthetic labor is monitored and enforced by senior executives.

Implications

Aesthetic labor includes a kind of human selection, socialization, and organizing that distorts communication processes through inherent gender, race, class, sexuality and age inequalities within labor market structures and processes. Unfortunately, “the United States labor law increasingly recognizes and defends employers’ rights to demand workers’ aesthetic conformity to their brand image” (Williams & Connell, 2010, p. 351). As such, embodied dispositions that are not socially equitable gain exchange value, thus reifying labor market segregation and broad social discrimination based on markers of difference. Ashcraft (2007) argues that gendered discourse of difference is “a fundamental organizing principle of occupational identity, which is a vital means of (re)producing the societal division and hierarchy of labor” (p. 15). In other words, discourses related to gender differences (and other issues related to intersectionality) constitute occupational identity and material/symbolic manifestations of job segregation in taken for granted ways.

It is interesting to think about the aesthetic labor of management consulting professionalism through Foucauldian surveillance techniques. As previously noted, consultants are called to be professional by the constant monitoring of both clients and colleagues. Professionalism on the client site must be upheld at all times because one never knows when the client might stop by. Regular presentations also put the consultant squarely into the spotlight of clients and colleagues. As Witz, Warhurst, and Nickson (2003) argue, “part of the process of consumption involves taking things in through the eyes as a sensory experience” (p. 46). Although the aesthetic labor of professionalism in the management consulting industry often functions to attract the client gaze (see also Dean, 2005 for the gaze in performing work), the client gaze also risks disrupting a strategically embodied construction of professionalism. From a critical approach to studying organizing, this is also problematic because the consumptive gaze can create insecurity through “shifting judgments of potential clients” (Karlsson, 2012, p. 59), thus constraining opportunities for a dignified, meaningful, and secure work environment.

Aesthetic labor is problematic because it exacerbates social inequalities by naturalizing embodied dispositions as commodified skills and can lead to occupational segregation. Yet, as Canning (1999) eloquently notes, careful reflection is needed “on the methodological implications of placing bodies at the heart of historical investigation” (p. 499). In the next section, I explain Ashcraft’s glass slipper metaphor and relate the previous example of the aesthetic labor of professionalism to its theoretical construction.

The Glass Slipper Metaphor

Ashcraft (2013) argues management studies must account for the role social identities play in constructions of occupations. The glass slipper metaphor is a theoretical tool, which serves *both* to marry diversity and occupation studies (historically separated scholarship) *and* introduce a collective-associative relationship (“work derives identity from associated people”) as opposed to the traditionally held work-practitioner relationship (“people derive identity from work”) (Ashcraft, p. 6). The glass slipper metaphor is used to explain how an occupation achieves a collective identity through the “embodied social identities of associated practitioners” (Ashcraft, p. 15). This framework is particularly helpful for examining occupational segregation practices. In this regard, Ashcraft suggests occupational attributes are strategically constructed by the bodies hired into those occupations, rather than indicators of the type or quality of work performed.

Reflecting back on the activities and processes of professional identity constructions relayed in the previous section, management consulting professionalism as seen through aesthetic labor practices is one possible example of Ashcraft's argument. Aesthetic labor directly addresses the anticipatory recruiting and socialization activities constructing the glass slipper. In terms of management consulting, specifically, we see bodies being funneled into this line of work in specific ways. This is evident from such participant responses about how professionalism is learned: "it's just built into the type of people we hire;" "they [the firm] recruited from my engineering program;" "I learned it from my Mom and Dad." As such, we might surmise that the essence of management consulting, as an occupation, is predicated on social identities related to such markers as heterosexual family structures and Ivy League education.

On the other hand, if we tilt the lens for analyzing occupational phenomena just so and apply a different set of conceptual tools, then the implications of such a metaphor can be interpreted differently and have vastly different ramifications for the qualitative strength of individual and collective capacity to affect and be affected.

Ashcraft (2013) argues "we judge the nature of work by the gender and race of associated practitioners" (p. 6) and the glass slipper metaphor is a way to account for this discriminatory practice. But, the glass slipper metaphor, however contingently, discursively, and/or symbolically constructed, runs the risk of sedimenting—"incorporating"—an essence of the matter contained by the slipper into an occupational resemblance. In the glass slipper metaphor, as a discursive construction of “aggregate selves with identities” (p. 8), occupations are relegated to bodies whose potential—whose essence—is “known by the company it keeps” (p. 8). This associational view, while providing insights into the intersections of organizing and difference, underestimates and therefore undermines the importance of the question Ashcraft is trying to get away from, “what we do” in terms of an occupational body’s capacity as a loving institution. I am not problematizing the role difference or diversity plays in organizing practices and potentially negative experiences of work and life. Rather, I am suggesting that when judgments are made about an essence or essentialized character of a body based on an embodied expression of identity, there is a great risk of *both* misrepresentation *and* negation of positive affect.

The glass slipper metaphor removes individual violence—“willful prejudice” (Ashcraft, 2013, p. 15)—from occupational segregation practices, but puts it squarely on the institutional shoulders of an amorphous collective body. This is a move that holds the potential for creating guilt-ridden associations for occupational members. By anthropomorphizing an occupation as “aggregate selves” (p. 8), an image reminiscent of Hobbes’ 1651 publication of *Leviathan* is called forth. In this case, a general will is produced by the multitude. A strong sovereign is a necessary, “foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of Warre, which is necessarily consequent […] to the naturall Passions of men” (Hobbes, 2010, p. 85). For Hobbes, change is only possible through a pre-democratic monarchy.

Foucault (1980) critiques such constitutions of power/knowledge relations in the following manner:

> Insofar as he is a fabricated man, Leviathan is no other than the amalgamation of a certain number of separate individualities, who find themselves reunited by the complex of elements that go to compose the State; but at the heart of the State, or rather, at its

> head, there exists something which constitutes it as such, and this is sovereignty, which Hobbes says is precisely the spirit of Leviathan. (pp. 97-98)

The spirit of the Leviathan as an aggregate of persons is filled with fear. There is an inherent negativity in Hobbes' view of human beings, as conflict and chaos are characterized as evil, fearful, violent, and controllable. The glass slipper analytical framework holds the potential for reducing the common notions of occupations to unified monarchies designed to keep Others out, while overlooking occupational lines of work as democratic methods of practice—bringing together singularities with a shared teleology.

The very metonymical symbolism of the glass slipper questions its use value for understanding the fairy tale princess or, the kingdom in which she lives. The fact that the prince has trouble finding a foot to fit the glass slipper prompts a re-evaluation of whether or not we really need the slipper to live happily ever after. Focusing on the question "with whom (i.e., with what embodied social identities, actual, usual, and/or figurative) is this work associated" (Ashcraft, 2013, p. 15) presupposes this is knowable through body expression. The glass slipper is a helpful heuristic for situating a particular socio-historical phenomenon—occupational identity—within the influences of and as an effect of power/knowledge relations. However, it seems to infer a type of morality judgment made internally and externally in the social construction process. While systemic discrimination and occupational segregation foreclose potentials to act, the glass slipper metaphor also forecloses the potential to act, if institutionalized as a metaphorical classification and reaction focused on resentment, comparison, and control.

Ashcraft's (2013) article promotes the value of the glass slipper as "correcting the mistaken assumption that the nature of an occupation is secure apart from the embodied social identities aligned with it" (p. 27). Yet, if we take occupations as aggregate selves, as Ashcraft suggests, then we also need to consider the common as a body itself with its own potential for affecting and being affected. But, the essence of a body is *not* tied to the attributes of its associative set, if viewed from the theorizations of self, power, and knowledge laid out in Chapter Three. In terms of the management consulting occupation, one consulting partner noted:

> In management consulting there is a bit of a label—people with MBAs, maybe a little bit of an engineering bias—but, that's not really true. People with really broad backgrounds come into the profession and I wonder if that's part of it. In management consulting, there are a diversity of skills needed and there are different ways you can be a good consultant. Putting a box around what a good consultant is is kind of hard to do.

This suggests that the management consulting occupation emphasizes action, rather than identity. This is corroborated with the descriptions of professionalism throughout the becoming processes of professional consultants as methods, rather than identity markers. In descriptions of their work, professional consultants give primacy to their function within client-consultant relationships, rather than the social identities of those relationships.

Fixation of occupational resemblances and associations could be construed as relegating those bodies as impotent—a position of weakness in the broader scheme of Nature. "The slave only conceives of power as the object of a recognition, the content of a representation, the stake in a competition, and therefore makes it depend, at the end of a fight, on a simple attribution of established values" (Deleuze, 2006, p. 10). This is precisely what the work of Nietzsche, Spinoza, and Foucault argue against as a mode of existence within an ethic of *life as a work of art*.

Brown (1995) paved the way for rethinking identity politics with her groundbreaking book on freedom, liberalism and political identity. She uses the notion of *ressentiment* to question calls for government policy intervention to redress historical social injuries. Brown argues that seeking state protectionist policies to address historical discrimination aligns with Nietzsche's notion of *ressentiment*. A politicized identity rooted in *ressentiment* is characterized by “its foreclosure of its own freedom, its impulse to inscribe in law and in other political registers its historical and present pain rather than conjure an imagined future of power to make itself” (Brown, p. 66). Seeking to right a wrong from a position of victimization redirects blame in a way that perpetuates weakness through an imagined moral righteousness.

> Identity projects for revealing social violence and hierarchy run aground when they become wedded to injury, creating, Wendy Brown claims, a group investment in maintaining the injured status with an attitude of ressentiment. Identity is regarded as a possession, we might say, and is defended as property. What is most significantly missing from such identity politics, as Brown insists, is the drive for freedom that should be their basis. (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 329)

Ressentiment substitutes “reasons, norms, and ethics for deeds” (Brown, p. 69). In seeking to heal the pain of patriarchal inequalities through political retribution-oriented policies, a rights-based identity can become institutionalized in a way that constitutes and perpetuates its inferior position in the future (Brown, 1995).

Nietzsche (1969) suggests that morality is defined by the weak as an impotent attempt to gain moralizing power over the strong. But, importantly, given earlier discussions of the enhancing affects of action and reactive negating affects of reaction, *ressentiment* suggests no action. As Deleuze (2006) clarifies, “reaction ceases to be acted in order to become something felt” (p. 111). Nietzsche ties historical constructions of morality with Judeo-Christian traditions. *Ressentiment* involves a reconfiguration—an attempt to reframe strength as evil. The weak find strength and security through collectivity:

> For one should not overlook this fact: the strong are as naturally inclined to separate as the weak are to congregate; if the former unite together, it is only with the aim of an aggressive collective action and collective satisfaction of their will to power, and with much resistance from the individual conscience; the latter, on the contrary, enjoy precisely this coming together—their instinct is just as much satisfied by this as the instinct of the born ‘masters’ (that is, the solitary, beast-of-prey species of man) is fundamentally irritated and disquieted by organization. (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 136)

Thus, an identity based in *ressentiment* is a vengeful, emotional reaction to a perceived injury.

The injury is simply the weak individual's powerlessness in comparison to the strong. A position of *ressentiment* blames an "Other" for its suffering as a way to alleviate its pain, but at the same time, feeds and re-infects the original wound in its identification with weakness. In sum, to use Nietzsche's (1969) words:

> This inversion of the value-positing eye—this need to direct one's view outward instead of back to oneself—is of the essence of ressentiment: in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all—its action is fundamentally reaction. (pp. 36-37)

The reason for this is that "slave-morality is essentially the morality of utility" (Nietzsche, 2012, p. 115).

Organizing the weak in Nietzsche's narrative is the ascetic priest. "As is well known, the priests are the *most evil enemies*" (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 33, emphasis in original). The ascetic priest fulfills an organizing function in gathering together the weak and powerless and redirecting their suffering so that the individuals feel they are to blame for their own suffering. The ascetic priest defends the herd "against the healthy, of course, and also against envy of the healthy; he must be the natural opponent *and despiser* of all rude, stormy, unbridled, hard, violent beast-of-prey health and might" (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 126, emphasis in original). In organizing the weak into a collective, the ascetic priest shifts the blame for suffering from the strong to the weak—thus, internalizing the *ressentiment*. In Nietzsche's formulation, the ascetic priest creates and sustains the wound by making people feel some kind of lack, a weakness in their own humanity.

This coming together as a collective is, in Nietzsche's mind, anathema to human nature. The strong stand alone—only the weak seek social contracts, the solace of a "herd organization" (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 135). Nietzsche argues against any conception of improvement as the result of these kinds of weak collectivities:

> If one intends it to convey that such a system of treatment has improved men I shall not argue: only I should have to add what 'improved' signifies to me—the same thing as 'tamed,' 'weakened,' 'discouraged,' 'made refined,' 'made effete,' 'emasculated' (thus almost the same thing as harmed). (p. 142, emphasis in original)

Nietzsche seems to suggest, then, that collective organizing has the potential for inscribing and sustaining a mentality of weakness. Grossberg's (1996) question about the future of identity studies is relevant: "what are the conditions through which people can belong to a common collective without becoming representatives of a single definition" (p. 88)? A collective-association view is based upon an underlying assumption that members of the collective are bound by the essence of their affiliation.

If we go back to Spinoza's work on bodies, then we have the conceptual tools to configure an alternative to the collective-associational view. When a body and another body (again, not necessarily human bodies) meet through various forces, the quality of the force is assessed. That which is active and strong is likely to decompose the reactive and weak because the constitutions are not equal, not agreeable to each other. "But it is assumed in the major premise that the bird of prey [active force] is able to not manifest its force, that it can hold back from its effects and separate itself from what it can do: it is evil because it does not hold itself back" (Deleuze, 2006, p. 123). Nature, with innate or cultivated teleologies, outweighs identity categorizations.

> When would they [men of *ressentiment*] achieve the ultimate, subtlest, sublimest triumph of revenge? Undoubtedly if they succeeded in poisoning the consciences of the fortunate with their own misery, with all misery, so that one day the fortunate began to be ashamed of their good fortune and perhaps said one to another: 'it is disgraceful to be fortunate: there is too much misery!' (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 124)

This is problematic to an ethic of life as a work of art because it transforms all *potentia* into reactive forces. These passions, as Spinoza would call them, are interiorized—resulting in reduced capacity for affecting and being affected (which, as discussed in Chapter Three, is how knowledge is created and made conscious). This also fundamentally impacts the potential for positive, loving relationships and institutions in our world.

Nietzsche's writings on strength have sometimes been misappropriated and misunderstood as advocating for a "master race" or individuals/collectives of "pure blood." This interpretation is expressly incorrect. Instead, Nietzsche is painting a portrait of *potentia* for ***all*** of humanity. As Kaufmann (1974) explains:

> Our impulses are in a state of chaos […] We think one way and live another; we want one thing and do another. No man can live without bringing some order into this chaos. This may be done by thoroughly weakening the whole organism or by repudiating and repressing many of the impulses: but the result in that case is not a "harmony," and the physis [nature of humanity] is castrated, not "improved." Yet there is another way—namely, to "organize the chaos": sublimation allows for the achievement of an organic harmony and leads to that culture which is truly a "transfigured physis." (p. 227)

Rather than seeing the value of human beings in terms of biological or socially constructed identity markers, Nietzsche conceived of the strong person as master of passions and enlivened creativity, which in its positivity and strength, is the promise of humanity's continued existence.

Rethinking the Collective: Occupation as Method

In the preceding section, I use the aesthetic labor of management consulting professionalism as *both* an exemplar of the glass slipper metaphor *and* an indicator of the potential risks associated with sedimenting such a symbolic categorization of a collective body. In this section, I use the power/knowledge relations established in Chapter Three as a springboard for refocusing the *potentia* of occupational collectives through method. This complements studies on how work is organized by difference through an examination of practices that can organize work through life-enhancing power. This is not to contradict or argue against the importance of occupational segregation analyses, but, rather, to extend the *both-and* framework developed throughout this text. There are always multiple sides to any story, and my contribution in this section is to bring forth the ways in which occupational collectives hold the potential for creating loving relationships and institutions through professional method.

Rather than thinking about the collective as a unified culture, an inclusive/exclusive social gathering, or as "the character of an occupation by the company it keeps" (Ashcraft, 2013, p. 6), I am advocating for an active conceptualization of occupations as methods—elite, professionalizing, emerging, or otherwise labeled. As singular individuals or organized collectives, this shifts the question from "this is who I am" or "this is what I do and with whom" to "this is where I am and how I am affecting and being affected in this particular moment through a variety of subjectifying forces, but all with my own participation—consciously or unconsciously." This marks an important shift from identity (contingent, but static) to function (active). How do collectives move forward in positive, affirmative ways, despite materially real, depreciative practices, such as occupational segregation?

Common Notions

Spinoza writes of common notions—"the representation of a composition between two or more bodies, and a unity of this composition" (Deleuze, 1988b, p. 54). The formation of the collective happens from a relational expression: "for when we encounter a body that agrees with ours, we experience an affect or feeling of joy-passion, although we do not adequately know what it has in common with us" (Deleuze, p. 55). Because the passion of joy can provoke common notions (while the passion of sadness does not), Spinoza deduces that reason enables us to select and organize body-relations that increase our capacity for joy. This is part of life as a work of art, albeit in a collective sense now. "The common notions are an Art, the art of the Ethics itself: organizing good encounters, composing actual relations, forming powers, experimenting" (Deleuze, p. 119). In terms of occupations, we might consider these types of work identifications as part of a complex way of life—an attraction to forces, which will increase our capacity to act in positive, joyful manners. But, importantly, "you do not know beforehand what good or bad you are capable of; you do not know beforehand what a body or a mind can do, in a given encounter, a given arrangement, a given combination" (Deleuze, p. 125).

Beyond its focus in Spinoza and Nietzsche's work, positivity as a transformative affect has gained the attention of contemporary social scientific circles, as well. Fredrickson's (2009) work offers scientific research on the beneficial effects of positivity on life, including psychological resiliency, social connections, mental mindfulness, and physical health. I found one of her findings particularly fascinating and relevant to this discussion:

> Even things that tend to divide people—like racial differences—seem to melt away when our hearts are warmed by positivity. As I said, this finding found us; we didn't seek it. By chance, we discovered that the oneness that you feel with others when positivity runs through you extends to strangers, even those you may otherwise perceive as very different from you. Instead of resorting to "they all look the same to me," under the influence of positivity you recognize that "we all look the same to me." We're all human, we're all "one of us." (Fredrickson, 2009, p. 68)

The affect of positivity, Fredrickson argues, is contagious. It sparks and spreads as people around those exhibiting characteristics of positivity mimic those perceived positive behaviors, expressions, and attitudes. Similarly, in outlining a future for the commonwealth, Hardt & Negri (2009) believe in the power-full affects of loving forces:

> We have greater power to think and to act, Spinoza explains, the more we interact and create common relations with others. Joy, in other words, is really the result of joyful encounters with others, encounters that increase our powers, and the institution of these encounters such that they last and repeat. (p. 379)

This is not unrelated to organizational communication research focusing on the positive affect of humor in destabilizing destructive communication practices (Mumby, 2009) and Eros in stimulating learning and creativity in the classroom (Trethewey, 2004). As my professor and dear friend, Lawrence Rosenfeld, once remarked, we may not have a choice in the kinds of invitations the universe offers us, but we do have some say in whether or not to respond to the invitation and the quality of our response.

Occupation as Method

Mary Parker Follett, an early 20th century management theorist and social critic, argued occupations should be construed as *methods* for constructing the self. This argument is revolutionary in two regards. First, it makes visible the discursive construction of occupational classifications and memberships—rendering boundaries fluid, contingent, temporal, and situational. Secondly, it ensures individual identities are not conflated with occupational classifications (and vice versa)—the self is only peripherally located in the set. While Foucault, Spinoza, and Nietzsche have provided theoretical and conceptual tools for understanding how we construct the world around us through organizing technologies, such as the professionalism episteme (Adams, 2012), and upon a field of power/knowledge possibilities, Follett's work brings methods that I believe materialize these theories into concrete practices that can be utilized within organizational and occupational contexts.

The notion of the collective as method, as I will employ it in this section, can be further understood through Agamben's (2009) discussion of singularities. It is impossible to infer an essential truth from the expression of a particular body (singular or collective)—the collective is not the essence of the singular example, nor would the aggregate singularities define the essence of the collective (Agamben, 2009; Spinoza, 1996).

> Agamben is arguing that the example functions as an example not by virtue of some common property which it shares with all the other possible members of the set, but rather by virtue of its metonymical (understood both literally and spatially) relation to the set itself. Any term can become an example of the set because what is at stake is the very claim of belonging to the set. (Grossberg, 1996, p. 104)

In this way, self is recast as *of*, rather than *in* occupational associations—a conceptual distinction with important ramifications. For, as Foucault (1997) argued, care of the self is also about the art of complex relationships with Others. To anthropomorphize occupations as "aggregate selves with identities" (Ashcraft, 2013, p. 8) is, in some respects, to perform the same violence to a body (in a collective sense) that Ashcraft argues against in terms of individual bodies (in terms of notions of difference). Occupation as method, rather than incorporation, is an alternative warranting additional analysis in its difference between active (method) and reactive (incorporation) potential for affect in the world.

How can we imagine the common without losing the singularity of self—or, respect of individual multiplicity? Where do we begin to re-imagine the collective within occupational domains? If identity marker differences risk perpetuating reactive, negative relations, then "what differences make a difference?" Instead of asking "what," I might revise the question to ask, "when does difference make a difference?" This shifts the focus on difference from a static, concrete "it" to a more fluid, temporal, and spatial (thus, inherently temporary) articulation. As Follett argued:

> No one group can enfold me, because of my multiple nature. This is the blow to the theory of occupational representation. But also no number of groups can enfold me. This is the reason why the individual must always be the unit of politics, as group organization must be its method. We find the individual through the group, we use him always as the true individual—the undivided one—who, living link of living group, is yet never embedded in the meshes, but is forever free for every new possibility of a forever unfolding life. (Follett, 1919, p. 295, emphasis in original, as cited in Carter, 1992, p. 70)

While the self is an effect of power/knowledge relations, thus pointing to the individual as a product of historical constructions, the self is at the same time always and already imbued with the capacity for doing and being otherwise. The self ethos proposed in "life as a work of art" imparts an ethic of agency, in that persons *both* are affected by *and* affect themselves in the becoming dimensions of self. The forces of power, knowledge, and self recursively impact each other. Thus, the self constantly seeks to overcome the power/knowledge attempts to "enfold" the self. As will be discussed in Chapter Six, this is a will to power for Nietzsche.

In the following sections, I outline four practices inspired by Follett and others' work that hold the potential for recasting occupations as methods and materializing the philosophical principles of Chapter Three into concrete practices for enhancing the world around us, both as singular selves and occupational practitioners: sacred dialogue, the gift, the promise of forgiveness, and integration. In each sub-section, I also highlight examples of these practices within the activities of professional management consultants.

1. Sacred dialogue.

The importance of dialogue cannot be understated. As Foucault (1997) reminds us, "in Plato, the themes of contemplation of self and care of self are related dialectically through dialogue" (p. 236). I believe in the transformative potential of intimacy and sacredness in interpersonal exchange. There are two ways this might be cultivated: listening and positioning. First, Foucault (1997) argues that the development of listening skills is a "positive condition for acquiring truth" and that "the art of listening is crucial" (p. 236) to balancing rationality and passion. One of my former Kenan-Flagler Business School professors, Gerald Bell, also argued for the importance of listening. He said listening is the number one skill required to be a good person—not leader, not parent, not employee, not lover—but, *person*. Part of this, I believe, is related to the good will, trust, and commitment to the Other that listening generates. Bauman and Donskis (2013) argue that trust is critical for communication:

> A deficit of trust inevitably leads to a wilting of communication; with the avoidance of communication and an absence of interest in its renewal, the 'strangeness' of strangers is bound to deepen and to acquire ever darker and more sinister tones, which in turn still

> more radically disqualifies them as potential partners in dialogue and in the negotiation of a mutually safe and agreeable mode of cohabitation. (p. 104)

The authors go on to suggest that vulnerability, anxiety, and fear of humiliation are part of the human condition, but in our contemporary society are exacerbated and harnessed by the state and market forces. While these conditions erect barriers to dialogue, dialogue also holds the potential for combating these conditions.

Secondly, in terms of positioning, thinking about the Other as "she" or "he" or "her, the consultant" reduces the person to what Buber (1958) calls, an "It."

> Just as the melody is not made up of notes nor the verse of words nor the statue of lines, but they must be tugged and dragged till their unity has been scattered into these many pieces, so with the man to whom I say Thou. I can take out from him the colour of his hair, or of his speech, or of his goodness. I must continually do this. But each time I do he ceases to be Thou. (p. 24)

The alternative is to come into the dialogue or interaction with the perspective of Other as "Thou." This conceptual move reestablishes the person's connection to power (which is God, for Buber) and mediates the inevitable rendering of subjectivities through our everyday sense-making processes.

Yet, it is impossible to see the Other as "Thou," if one does not also see one's self as "Thou" first:

> You cannot endure yourselves and do not love yourselves enough: now you want to seduce your neighbor to love, and then gild yourselves with his error […] One man goes to his neighbor because he seeks himself; another because he would lose himself. Your bad love of yourselves turns your solitude into a prison. (Nietzsche, 1966, p. 61)

Sacred dialogue requires equals—both "Thous" in the communicative exchange.

Sacred dialogue brings together two dynamics crucial to management consulting professionalism, as well as humans and collectives more broadly. First, is the Greek translation of "logos" within the word "dialogue," which points to a method of thinking (Cissna &

Anderson, 1998). Secondly, the sacred captures the loving unknown and uniqueness of an interactional moment with our partner—which, importantly, are fleeting, rather than sustainable. The sacred in this sense indicates a provisional meeting in mutuality—which seems similar to what Sloterdijk (2011) calls "atmospheric biunity" (p. 43). Sacred dialogue makes possible the coming together, or integration, of "Thous." This integration or biunity is not an assimilation or homogenization—there is no sacrifice or giving up—only an acceptance of singularity and an openness to affect and be affected. Sacred dialogue, then, is a way of thinking about interactions with "Thous" that holds the *potentia* for creating space for loving affect.

This is not to suggest that all interactions will facilitate sacred dialogue. As previously discussed, there are bodies that are "bad" for our body and affect it in depreciating manners. However, the method of sacred dialogue is a possibility and one to seek for its strength to affect in positive ways. But, if sacred dialogue is not possible, so be it. As Nietzsche (1969) describes how he avoids *ressentiment* and maintains a position of action, rather than reaction:

> To this day I still have the same affability for everyone; I even treat with special respect those who are lowliest: in all of this there is not one grain of arrogance or secret contempt. If I despise a man, he guesses that I despise him: by my mere existence I outrage everything that has bad blood in its veins. (p. 258)

By lowly, Nietzsche is not referencing particular notions of difference (e.g., class), but is pointing to the weak, those who would cast blame and guilt as a moralized attempt to gain power (however illusory or misguided this approach is given our understanding of power). In sacred dialogue, the partners are equals—both "Thous." What Nietzsche is getting at is the importance of "letting your own light shine," as the cliché goes:

> As in the stellar firmament there are sometimes two suns which determine the path of one planet, and in certain cases suns of different colours shine around a single planet, now with red light, now with green, and then simultaneously illumine and flood it with motley colours: so we modern men, owing to the complicated mechanism of our "firmament," are determined by DIFFERENT moralities; our actions shine alternately in different

> colours, and are seldom unequivocal—and there are often cases, also in which our actions are MOTLEY-COLOURED. (Nietzsche, 2012, p. 78, emphasis in original)

If two bodies are not compatible from a Spinozan/Nietzschean sense, then one will be threatened by the strength of the Other—rather than enlivened by the strength, which would create greater joy and love from the coming together as a common notion. The ramifications of this are important for rethinking the potential of the world. Sacred dialogue is not possible if the participants view each other in ways that create moralized difference—the master-slave relation.

Management consulting professionalism example. Several consultants mentioned the importance of dialogue to management consulting professionalism. One consultant even went so far as to say, "you can never put people in a position where they are not valued." This points to a respect of the Other important to crafting the kind of sacred dialogue described. Another consultant pointed out: "If you are uncomfortable having a particular conversation, then it's probably not the right thing to do." Dialogue is a method that works to ensure productive partnering and cultivates trust and integrity.

As argued, sacred dialogue recasts the unequal relation between an "I" and an "it" into "I" and "Thou." One consulting executive describes the benefits of this practice at his firm:

> The way I conduct myself is through an unwavering commitment to integrity—creating an environment of transparency where information can be shared with the appropriate people. I've always felt the more we can eliminate the "us versus them" barrier that exists in a consulting relationship, the better it is for the team. As a leader at my firm, it helps with my bond to my clients and my consultants.

Previous consultants stories also indicated a commitment to this kind of equal partnering that is cultivated in professionalism.

2. The gift.

The essence of the client-consultant relationship is not bound by the economic transaction in which it was created. Mauss' (1990) elaboration of the gift in archaic societies offers insights into the combined political, aesthetic, spiritual, and economic dimensions of gift giving. For Mauss (1990), gifts "are not freely given, they are also not really disinterested. They already represent for the most part total counter-services, not only made with a view to paying for services or things, but also to maintaining a profitable alliance, one that cannot be rejected" (p. 73). The gift is not without intention—it may be to cultivate trust, to demonstrate potential, or to create alliances. But, importantly, it is the necessity of reciprocation when given a gift that ensures the promise of long-term connection and accountability to the relationship.

The client-consultant relationship, as already noted, is important to long-term business survival, as repeat business and word-of-mouth recommendations ensure stable business operations for consulting firms. Given descriptions of consultant aspirations and desires for partnering and "being a part of something bigger," the client-consultant relationship is not purely a capitalist exchange of money for knowledge. Although client payments facilitate the economic exchange for consultant knowledge, professionalism activates the creation of value in this context. As argued in Chapter Two, the management consulting value proposition is predicated on professionalism. Thus, the exchange is less about "goods, wealth, and products in transactions concluded by individuals" (Mauss, 1990, p. 5) and more about the generation of relational goodwill.

Thinking about the client-consultant relationships as a gift is another way to conceptualize the affectual power of integration. For Mauss (1990), gifting has enabled societies throughout the ages to learn how "to oppose and to give to one another without sacrificing themselves to one another" (p. 82). Through obligations to *both* accept *and* to give gifts, social gifting practices promote equality, democracy, happiness, and a "will to peace" (p. 82). The gift does not have to be a product or a piece of information, but can include commitment, kindness, and strategy, for example. The very intangible essence of management consulting professionalism makes this concept difficult to articulate, but I believe there is a relational dynamic to it that is not captured as a purely economic transaction. For both the management consultant and the client, there is an element of self that is offered up as part of a partnership (integration) in the name of creation (whether that be in the form of a business product, social network, or self fulfillment, for example.) This is a gift from which the long-term affects and effects of the relational exchange are potentially powerful, but unknown.

The gift exchange can be conceptualized as a type of psychical archive. Through social network development and the exchanges inherent to the client-consultant relationship, further exploration of the archived professional consultant (Adams, 2012) is warranted. Given the high turnover rate within the industry, consultants take the established patterns of mobility, interaction, and accumulated power/knowledge into industry positions. Yet, the obligatory gifting of self, power, and knowledge within the consulting engagement ensures a continued exchange between client and consultant. We might see this as consultants are seeded into client organizations, or we might see this as consultants hiring their former firms for future projects. This notion is also evident in the professionalism ethic cultivated through experience—as former consultants tend to fulfill consulting-style roles and responsibilities in their new industry organizations.

Management consulting professionalism example. One consulting executive compared his consulting work to his previous work in financial auditing and suggested that management consulting is much more about "value creation." For this consultant, this suggests a commitment to action and identifying opportunities for clients and consultants to flourish. Relatedly, another consulting executive, who has been with his firm nine years, provided an example of how the consultant-client relationship might be conceptualized and enacted within the notion of the gift:

> Most of my clients are those I have worked with for three to five years. We would not have such a long-term relationship if we were not delivering value consistently. Having those kinds of relationships is what I enjoy the most.

The reciprocal exchange of knowledge and self characteristic of professional relationships between client and consultant is a gift given by both parties. The effects of these exchanges have long-term affects, but also are fundamentally unknowable. For example, the consultant who was invited to a project reunion 10 years after an IT implementation expressed surprise that his experience on a client project could sustain such positive relationships and possess the power to bring people back together again after so many years.

The following consultant quote exemplified the powerful potential of a methodological approach to client-consultant relationships as a gift:

> I guess it is a kind of enlightened self interest here where you recognize if you serve the client well and the client over the years is better off from having used you for advice, it will come back to you in the future and obviously they need to progress, as well, in order to pull you back in in the future. It's a symbiotic relationship.

Professionalism as action in the management consulting occupation creates, organizes, and directs these symbiotic relationships.

3. The promise of forgiveness.

Crafting "life as a work of art" includes making mistakes. As human beings, we are perfect in our imperfection. Part of the challenge of life, then, is to accept our own positioning within a field of power/knowledge relations. This temporal and spatial positioning informs our relationships to Others within a shared power base. Or, in other words, our interconnections with Others are constituted by a shared capacity to affect and be affected (power), albeit in qualitatively different ways. Without this consciousness, we only operate on the plane of knowledge—constructing other superficial structures and reifying extant power relations without disarticulating constituting capacities for affect. Forgiveness, rather than judgment; forgiveness, rather than classification and hierarchies of difference; forgiveness, rather than valorization of difference—this is what increases rather than diminishes our human capacity to affect and be affected. Pain and evil is resisting, struggling, judging, and holding a grudge (Nietzsche, 1969).

Part of the becoming processes of professional management consultants involves a constant forgiveness of self and Others in developing relationships and achieving project objectives. Forgiveness is a method of practice for the strong, as it requires love and courage. Nietzsche (1969) takes up this point in the following manner:

> To be incapable of taking one's enemies, one's accidents, even one's misdeeds seriously for very long—that is the sign of strong, full natures in whom there is an excess of power to form, to mold, to recuperate and to forget […] such a man shakes off with a *single* shrug many vermin that eat deep into other. (p. 39, emphasis in original)

It is through forgiveness that a love for Others is generated and can be cultivated through such practices as sacred dialogue and gifting. Forgiveness is another practice that ensures two parties come together as equals for the power-full potential of creation and capacity for affect in the world. Forgiveness, then, prevents individuals and collectives from internalizing "wrongs" and being so overcome with negative affect that action is impossible.

Forgiveness accepts that which is necessarily within power/knowledge relations. Importantly, this does not mean accepting violence, discrimination, or other harms against people/Nature. Acceptance facilitates alternative articulations without the *ressentiment* inherent to judgments. Arendt (1958) argues that forgiving:

> […] is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven. (p. 241)

As such, this project alludes to a different kind of morality—one conscious of power/knowledge relations and the various organizing frameworks that *both* construct how we know and experience the world (as we have focused on the professionalism episteme) *and* sustain infinite opportunities for being otherwise. In this sense, ethics is about the manners in which we act (both in action and reaction) within fields of possibility discursively generated by power-knowledge relations. Strategically and contingently constructed rules, values, and structures (both symbolic and material) *both* determine *and* rupture human experience.

Management consulting professionalism example. None of my management consultant interviews discussed forgiveness directly. However, the professional mindset is such that consultants go into client interactions armed with the knowledge that "doing the right thing" may inflict a perceived violence on the client. This could be in the form of telling a client something s/he does not want to hear or recommending a strategy that may have particular impacts on the client who hired the consulting firm. As one consultant explained:

> Oftentimes, a lot of the work you are doing is going to personally impact the individual that hired you. The answer that might be the best answer for the organization might or might not be the best answer for the individual.

Several consultants talked about difficult conversations with people when project findings concluded the hiring client's job was not necessary to future operations.

Forgiveness, in this sense, would enable the client not to internalize the consultant action as personally motivated, thus potentially creating *ressentiment*. Instead, forgiveness recognizes the qualitative power of the action for moving the organization in positive ways. Thus, the potential affect of the action is not lost in individual reaction, but enhanced and made more powerful. Additionally, it would be important for the consultant not to judge the affective quality of the decision based upon the reaction of the client (potentially creating bad consciousness within the consultant and reducing her potential for affect) because the long-term *potentia* of the action is unknowable.

4. Integration.

In the early 1920s and 1930s, Follett embarked upon a political project that analyzed "the relations of human beings to each other in the institutions which they develop" (Follett, 1949, p. xi). Follett advocated for "systems of cross functioning" (p. 9) long before cross-functional teamwork became a corporate buzzword in the late 1990s. I find her concept of integration particularly compelling as a practice for democratic partnerships—founded upon self and Other as equals, with the interests of both parties considered equally important. Her focus on integration resonates with Hardt & Negri's (2009) call for capacities in cooperation, autonomy, and network organization for the emergence of more democratic organizing practices (p. 353).

Follett's focus is on solving business challenges and she foresaw the professionalization of business knowledge. In thinking about collective responsibility, she reasoned that the first step is to identify the field of control—"the factors which constitute that problem" (Follett, 1949, p. 11). She complicates this classification by saying that it is the *reciprocal relations* between these factors that constitute a field of control. Follett contends:

> We cannot rid of our joint obligation by finding the fraction of our own therein, because our own part is not a fraction of the whole, it is in a sense the whole. Wherever you have a joint responsibility, it can only be met jointly. (p. 74)

Her solution, integration, is specifically relevant to management consulting work. Integration is neither A's work or B's work, but an invention of something new. $A + B \neq AB$. Instead, $A + B = £$. Instead of a synthesis, the thesis and antithesis walk together only to create something new, not to unify or incorporate. As such, the antithesis is not really an "anti" or opposing force of a dialectical tension, but simply a thesis #2. "£" is neither the essence of A, nor the essence of B.

Thus, integration is neither sacrifice nor compromise. It sounds simple, but requires courage because the process in practice is quite difficult because there is an underlying risk of sacrificing or decomposing the self or Other in the communicative (inter)action. There are never any guarantees.

Related to management consulting, integration was important to an emerging phenomenon Follett wrote about in the early 1930s—the role of experts in business operations as advice-givers. Follett (1949) argues for a method of practice, called integration, which she describes in the following manner:

> While the executive should give every possible value to the information of the expert, no executive should abdicate thinking because of the expert. The expert's opinion should not be allowed automatically to become a decision. On the other hand, full recognition should be given to the part the expert plays in decision making. Our problem is to find a method by which the opinion of the expert does not coerce and yet enters integrally into the situation. Our problem is to find a way by which the specialist's kind of knowledge and the executive's kind of knowledge can be joined. (p. 70)

An important contribution of the notion of integration is the primacy given to function over identity (i.e., "hierarchy of position") (Follett, p. 4). By accepting each party as separate and different, yet joined by a collective responsibility and connectedness to a business problem, Follett engineers an innovative collectivity predicated on *both* Sameness *and* Otherness. The capacity to affect in affirmative ways is enhanced through the integration of difference into something new. Again, for Follett, this does not involve sacrifice or assimilation, but recognition that one's difference (or, singularity, to use Agamben's term) is, in essence, fundamental to the whole. Through integration, a "consciousness of oneness" is generated (Carter, 1992, pp. 67-69), but without the homogenizing effects of collective identity. Shifting, relational affiliations replace embodied difference in Others as the foundation for collective organizing.

Management consulting professionalism example. The notion of integration came up in consultant discussions in various ways. One consultant proclaimed:

> Professionalism allows us, as a crop of people, to coexist and contribute as outsiders. Embedded in professionalism is a respect for those people who you're dealing with. My job is to help the team create the answer—it is not about being a know-it-all.

Through this statement, the notion of integration reconciles two challenges of management consulting professionalism: 1) respecting the client Other as a "Thou" rather than a "Them" or "It" and 2) coexisting as equals to create something new. Neither the client nor the consultant is incorporated or subsumed within the relationship, but both retain and capitalize upon each other's singularity.

Another consulting executive compares his consulting teams to sports teams. The power of the team is predicated upon the power of each individual coming together for a shared purpose. As he says, "everybody has a different skill set, everybody has something to add, and you leverage that to do better." Note that this consultant uses the phrase *to do better*, rather than *to be better*. The singular abilities, knowledge, and strength inform and enhance the collective *potentia* of the group. Thus, the team is not a synthesis of its players in terms of incorporating and subsuming the attributes of its members, but instead, is an integrative method for generating affective potential to do and create something new. In integration, function is given primacy over identity/form.

Summary

The four occupation as method practices outlined in this section require an organic, rather than synthetic or manufactured integration of rationality and passion. This is inherently a *both-and* proposition. There is neither a loss of passion nor a loss of rationality. Rather, there is a systematic integration that is not dialectical, but methodologically creative. The conceptual result of this framework is that occupations and individual constructions of self no longer can be based on normative ideals or embodied identity attributes. Method and action are the criteria through which an understanding is gained about the active force and *potentia* for increasing human flourishing.

For management consulting, I would argue a fundamental force affecting individual and collective relations is the client-consultant relationship. Many consultants talked of the loving relationships shared with their client partners. One could say this gets subverted into capitalist aims—only creating relationships to get more work. But, it also is motivational, given consultant descriptions of what they "get out" of the relationship more aesthetically or spiritually. The client-consultant relationship is not based on pure rationality or economic motivation.

One of the significant contributions of this research is in bringing to light the passion of consulting. Management consulting professionalism expectations thus require a blending of rationality and passion. In recognizing the difference in the client, consultants adapt constructions of professionalism depending upon the needs, desires, and aspirations of the client. In no way does the consultant "lose" her/himself in this refraction, but instead operates as a chameleon (a metaphor several consultants used in their descriptions). Although we tend to think of a chameleon's shifting colors as defensive and deceptive, we also can bring a *both-and* perspective to this adaptive mechanism by thinking about it as a constructive capability for the chameleon to integrate without disrupting/subsuming/being subsumed within the environment. Professionalism, as an organizing technology of management consulting work, is a collective resonance that brings together people in the name of client relationship building and the powerful *potentia* of these partnerships for making a difference in the world and being a part of something bigger.

The driving occupational teleology for consultants is in understanding "who is my client?" Management consulting success is predicated on answering this question from both relational and output/deliverable perspectives. Embedded in this question is an assumption of difference—"I see you as Other." This assumption of difference is foundational to philosophical and political love. But, of course, love can be evil and love can be perverted. If we think about the external cause of the client relationship, then it is easy to imagine love manifesting in ways that reduce the potential of our selves and others.

In becoming professional, consultant actions toward client relationships can build the potential of *both* consultants *and* clients. But, actions toward client relationships can reduce the potential of *both* consultants *and* clients. In the name of professionalism, actions reflecting collaboration, transparency, hard work, creativity, and loving feelings for the client can create potent partnerships. But, on the other hand, in the name of professionalism, barriers to intimacy, focus on achieving the next statement of work, and working consultants without respite can detract from and negate the potential of the client-consultant relationship to affect and be affected in beautiful ways.

Many consultants noted that they did not know anything about management consulting work prior to joining their firms. We might re-imagine management consulting as holding the potential for a community of singularities (Agamben, 2009). As such, "identity can become a marker of people's abiding in such a singular community, where the community defines an abode marking people's ways of belonging within the structured mobilities of contemporary life" (Grossberg, 1996, p. 105). This abiding could be productively analyzed as a method. I heard from consultants about their desires to help clients solve business challenges, the challenges of renegotiating relationships at regularly shifting project sites, and the fluidity of firm- and client-specific professionalism markers.

Professionalism does not interpellate consultants into forced occupational identity categories, but, rather, performs the organizing work shaping the ethic of self within shifting, contextualized power/knowledge intersections. Management consultant professionals are perhaps one example of an "elite" occupational identity category that can be re-imagined and re-theorized as positive, affirming, and active—an alternative way of thinking about collective becomings in capitalist societies. This kind of occupational community would be known by the actions it takes in the form of sacred dialogue, gifting, forgiveness, and integration. As I will argue in the next chapter, to move forward in this regard requires exceptional courage.

VI. Courage: Concluding discussion

"To love is to struggle, beyond solitude, with everything in the world that can animate existence"

(Badiou, 2012)

One early morning about 15 years ago, I was standing on a subway platform in Park Slope, Brooklyn heading into the city for my organizational redesign project at Chase Manhattan Bank. It was before rush hour began, so it was just me and two or three other people in the station. As my train approached, a man near me jumped down onto the tracks, made his way closer to the train, lay down across the tracks, and committed suicide. At first I didn't understand what was happening—I thought maybe he had dropped something accidentally. I remember wishing he would hurry up and get back to the safety of the platform. I had not thought of this incident in many years, but was reminded of it as I read some books recently that addressed the effects of contemporary free-market capitalism on human life.

Some of these texts advocate for a symbolic suicide of self-identity as a response to the constraints and deadening affects of capitalist enterprise (Berardi, 2009; Cederström & Fleming, 2012). However, I believe attempts to disconnect the animating breath of life (what Nietzsche calls a "will to power") from power/knowledge constructions of self are implausible, however symbolic and abstract. Thinking we can "start over" or symbolically kill our selves misunderstands the art of becoming processes. Indeed, Spinoza (1996) asks, "why do humans presuppose that all things lead to a certain end?" (p. 26). There is no one, single cause for that which we perceive as imperfect in our world. There is no fixed self that we can grab and throw in the trash. There is no way to sever the connections—the intricate webs of D/discourses and actions that make up everyday existence within power/knowledge relations. Human capacity to affect and be affected *both* animates *and* constrains life, as we are always and forever connected with other bodies (human or otherwise) that shape becoming processes of self.

The Will to Power

The power, or *potentia*, of human existence is that "no one has yet determined what the body can do" (Spinoza, 1996, p. 71). Spinoza elaborates:

> For the perfection of things is to be judged solely from their nature and power; things are not more or less perfect because they please or offend men's senses, or because they are of use to, or are incompatible with, human nature. (p. 31)

The capacity to act and to be acted upon neither can be determinately defined as positive or negative, nor good or evil. If the world is as it is and there is a human *potentia* in everyone to affect and be affected, in ways that can detract from or enhance our capacities, then this is the ethic for defining existence. Additionally, if we cannot know what a body can do, then there must be some aspect that remains beyond the disciplinary capture of human constructions of economic rationality, aesthetic labor, and work identification. Part of humanity remains free through some other connection to its originating breath of life—perhaps a Nietzschean will to power. This means that however grave social critics might get about the "soulless living death" experienced by contemporary workers, there is always the capacity for change. Judgments about the need to emancipate corporate workers are easy to make, but such criticisms neglect the life force each person has, regardless of how suffocating one finds work. Thus, it is perhaps not capitalism that needs revolutionizing, but rather our perceptions about what it means to be human (at work or otherwise).

Follett's (1998) work on community politics in the early part of the 20th century resonates in this regard. She writes:

> As the social consciousness develops, ought will be swallowed up in will. We are some time truly to see our life as positive, not negative, as made up of continuous willing, not of restraints and prohibition. Morality is not the refraining from doing certain things—it is a constructive force. (p. 53)

She says, "the test of our morality is whether we are living not to follow but to create ideals" (p. 55). Follett emphasizes an ethic of collective action and creativity (Carter, 1992). Inherent to this understanding of human ontology is a capacity and strength for doing, seeing, and being otherwise. In each of us is this "constructive force"—a will in our very DNA to exist and affect and be affected. Indeed, Follett declares: "To *claim* our individuality is the one essential claim we have on the universe" (p. 82, emphasis in original). Methods that can put this philosophical ontology into practice include integration, sacred dialogue, the power of forgiveness, and the promise of the gifts of relational exchange.

Nietzsche saw philosophers and artists as exemplars of aesthetic and moral mastery. Through consciousness of power/knowledge relations and acceptance of their own will to power, philosophers and artists are affirmative forces of the world. But, Nietzsche suggests the transformation of that which might be characterized as sacred (the reason and strength of philosophers and artists to walk to the beat of a different drummer, so to speak), only emerged through a reckoning of weakness and bad consciousness. I wonder if this is part of what we see in Foucault's work, which resists offering solutions to determining discursive technologies and subjectivities. This type of "bad consciousness" interiorizes strength and affirmative capacities to affect as that which is different, shameful, and unfair to those without the same qualitative will to power. Organizational studies include this type of disclaimer regularly—"I must be careful not to reinscribe power relations through my solutions." But, we do not have an all-knowing consciousness through which to judge the actions we are called to perform—regardless of the spatial and temporal power/knowledge relations of which we operate.

The will to power, in this sense, is an overcoming of the self. As Nietzsche (1969) confesses, “my humanity is a constant self-overcoming” (p. 233). The famous example of the will to power is the transformation of the acorn. “The acorn gives up its existence to become an oak tree and thus to become more powerful” (Kaufmann, 1974, p. 255). It is the will to negate self-constraints to our inherent strength, which is needed to provoke creative force. The following description of this process brings us back to the title of this text, *life as a work of art*: “they all crave neither the preservation of their lives, nor merely freedom from something, nor even power as a means to accomplish some specific end” (Kaufmann, p. 255). In the here and now—life as it exists as is—this ethic incites a stylized character, organized chaos, and loving, passionate creation.

Unlike positions of *ressentiment*, bad consciousness, and ascetic ideals, which derive pleasure from the pain in Others (including the self), an attitude of strength and positivity may hurt Others in its propensity for action and to affect, but it is not an evil intention. This is why love requires such courage:

> How much truth does a spirit endure, how much truth does it dare? More and more that became for me the real measure of value. Error (faith in the ideal) is not blindness, error is cowardice. (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 218)

Love, in a political rather than romantic sense, is only for the strong. The weak would destroy to feel power, but that only cements a position of weakness. Knowledge comes from the courage to move through power/knowledge relations and the corresponding opportunities to affect and be affected. This is the motor force driving the development of an ethic of self. Not as an improvement or achievement of a transcendental self, but simply the consciousness of self as imbricated in power/knowledge planes of existence.

To reinforce this point about courage in a "life as a work of art" ethos, I particularly like the following assertion by Follett (1998):

> We give up self when we are too sluggish for the heroic life. For our self is after all the greatest bother we ever know, and the idea of giving it up is a comfortable thought for sluggish people, a narcotic for the difficulties of life. But it is a cowardly way out. The strong attitude is to face that torment, our self, to take it with all its implications, all its obligations, all its responsibilities, and be ourselves to the fullest degree possible. (p. 82)

This resonates with Nietzsche's (1969) belief that the strong constantly seek out obstacles to overcome in order to strengthen themselves. But, these obstacles come in the form and shape of Others of strength. Again, the bringing together of qualitatively equal strength is important. Battling the weak is a position of weakness; battling the strong prepares the strong for future obstacles. Yet, this argument also relies upon Spinoza's (1996) framework that all bodies are attributes of Nature. Enhancing and strengthening one's power is only productive if one enhances and strengthens Others' power, as well. To face these difficulties and be present in the moment for whatever power/knowledge affects arise, as Follett suggests, requires remarkable courage.

The will to power is "*both* a complement of force *and* something internal to it" (Deleuze, 2006, p. 49, emphasis added). It is the genetic material. "Chance is the bringing of forces into relation, the will to power is the determining principle of this relation" (Deleuze, p. 53). As Kaufmann (1974) describes in his biography of Nietzsche:

> He considers the will to power, which remains throughout, the "essence," while "all ends," "objectives," and the like, are merely accidental and changing attributes "of the one will," "of the will to power" (The Will to Power, p. 675). In other words, not only the energy remains but also the objective, power; and those so-called objectives which are canceled are only accidental attributes of this more basic striving: they are, to use one of Nietzsche's favorite terms, mere "foregrounds." (pp. 221-222)

As such, “*active* and *reactive* designate the original qualities of force but *affirmative* and *negative* designate the primordial qualities of the will to power” (Deleuze, pp. 53-54, emphasis in original). The will to power is like breathing—we can be conscious of it, but are most often unconscious of it. There is pleasure in the will to power as it is activity—an incitement to live, to exist, to engage. “What the will to power wills is a particular relation of forces, a particular quality of forces” (Deleuze, p. 85). Furthermore:

> The will to power is essentially creative and giving: it does not aspire, it does not seek, it does not desire, above all it does not desire power. It gives: power is something inexpressible in the will (something mobile, variable, plastic); power is in the will as “the bestowing virtue,” through power the will itself bestows sense and value. (Deleuze, p. 85)

On top of the diagram of power/knowledge relations **(Appendix C)** one can imagine an energetic overlay—a pulsing mist intimately related to the river of power and fountain of knowledge, if you will. This is the will to power—a desire to overcome that of which the self is part. Life as a work of art is instructed and motivated by this will to power. It can be reactive or active, thus affirming or negating. It can be joyful and productive, or it can inflict violence on the self and Others. But, in any case, it is creative. This is the ethical project of self: the will to power, which is the will to overcome one’s self through consciousness of power/knowledge relations that constantly work to shape “Its” rather than “Thous,” “subjectivities” rather than souls, and differences rather than singularities.

Perhaps, then, it is not uncanny that we find a particular resemblance within occupational collectives. This might signal a similar qualitative strength (or weakness) of will to power. We could then interpret the “elite” judgment regarding the occupation of management consulting *both* as a moral privileging of certain bodies (collective segregation) *and* as a shared strength of capacity to affect change (collective method)—both with particular affects and effects.

Love

For Spinoza (1996), love is the joy accompanied by the knowledge of an external power to affect or be affected. Therefore, love is an antagonism (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 195). A consciousness that humans live in the constant embrace of power/knowledge relations—that life is a work of art filled with constant becomings—offers a rupture to taken-for-granted conceptualizations of professional identity, occupational classes, and, more broadly, day-to-day life. Hardt & Negri (2009) identify five criteria for love's potential:

> First, the content of the link between love and force is the common, which composes the interaction of singularities in processes of social solidarity and political equality. Second, the direction of love's force is oriented toward the freedom of those singularities. Third, the organizational forms of this exercise of force are always open, constitutive, and horizontal, such that every time it is solidified in fixed vertical relations of power, love exceeds it and overflows its limits, reopening organization again to the participation of all. Fourth, the relation between love and force is legitimated in the consensus of singularities and the autonomy of each, in a relationship of reciprocity and collective self-rule. Fifth, this force is always directed toward consolidating this process in institutions that can allow it to continue ever more powerfully. (pp. 196-197)

These criteria are evident in the occupation-as-method proposed earlier: sacred dialogue, the gift, the promise of forgiveness, and integration. Singularities. Equality. Reciprocity. Positive force. The elements of Hardt & Negri's conceptualization of love increase the power of self, the force and positivity through which generates a collective coming together of similar affect and force—resulting in the flourishing of all and the creation of loving institutions.

It is through these loving practices, corresponding affects, and potential to institutionalize this type of attitude and ethic that both individuals as singularities and individuals as collectives facilitate a mode of existence characterized by strength. Existence is an ethos, not a possession (Agamben, 2009). It is in this way, Badiou (2012) suggests the project of love is "to construct a world from a decentered point of view other than that of my mere impulse to survive or re-affirm my own identity" (p. 25). Introducing love as an antidote to corporate colonization (Deetz,

1992) and contemporary insensitivity to Others (Bauman & Donskis, 2013) offers a gentle reminder that employees are humans, rather than commodities. For Spinoza, love is about joy and the potential of the body to be affected and moved in ways that promote human flourishing.

Yet, love is always tied to war because force is necessary to constitute "the interaction of singularities in processes of social solidarity and political equality" (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 196). For the authors, love is "the movement toward freedom in which the composition of singularities leads toward not unity or identity but the increasing autonomy of each participating equally in the web of communication and cooperation" (p. 189). In this conceptualization, singularity and equality are crucial, as previously discussed in Follett's work on integration. Employment relationships infused with love bring risk and conflict—two elements necessary for transformational and emancipatory change. Love, in this appropriation, disrupts the normative status quo and professional homogeneity characteristic of neoliberal organizing and reestablishes collective formation within the spirit of Follett's practice of integration.

Implications for Management Consulting Professionalism

The management consulting business model is such that it affords the opportunities for promise, forgiveness, integration, and love. Although there is an organizational studies critique to be made of the precarious, self-as-brand emphasis of post-Fordist operating structures, the case of management consulting also points to a great potential for developing what Hardt & Negri (2009) call transformative, loving institutions.

A perspective of *both-and* is helpful for organizational studies as it recasts the experiences of humans at work within a broader understanding of life as a work of art. This perspective of "*both-and*" is helpful for organizational analyses because it resists simplification of the complex issues of identity, humanness, and contemporary work within global capitalism. For Foucault (1997):

> I do not think that a society can exist without power relations, if by that one means the strategies by which individuals try to direct and control the conduct of others. The problem, then, is not to try to dissolve them in the utopia of completely transparent communication but to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the ethos, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible. (p. 298)

The moral of this story is that an ethic grounded in "life as a work of art" constitutes the toolkit needed to negotiate the currents of rationality and passion guiding us through power/knowledge formations in ways that promote love, joy, and positive affect. The becoming activities of professional management consultants indicate a great potential for spreading these positive affects through thoughtful and productive partnerships with people and organizations from around the world.

Life as a Work of Art

Rafael was one of my favorite artists at some of the famous European museums I visited during my stay at Birkbeck College last summer. Although I am not an art history expert, I conducted some research on Rafael's work and life and found some interesting parallels to this discussion of management consulting professionalism. The author of a recent biography describes Rafael's life philosophy in a way that closely resembles the "life as a work of art" ethic I am advocating for in this project. By way of closing, I share some background information on Rafael's revolutionary artistic approach and the correlations to what I see as key points of interest regarding the becomings of professional management consultants.

Forcellino's (2012) biography provides insights into how Raphael Sanzio balanced rationality and passion in *both* his professional art practice *and* personal life during his rise to fame as an artist in Rome's papal court in the early 16th century. Eschewing common characterizations of Rafael's work as simply a spiritual quest for God, Forcellino shows how Rafael overcame common moral subjections of the time thus living his own life in a manner resembling that of his famous artworks. Inspired by the intellectual metaphysical musings of Leonardo da Vinci and the combustible creative chaos of Michelangelo, Rafael exemplifies a "life as a work of art," as his own life "overcomes all conflict, reconciles all cultural, social, and erotic tension, and reveals a natural grace without necessarily presupposing divine inspiration, entirely thanks to the happiness resulting from his own sensual gratification" (Forcellino, p. 9). Rafael revolutionized the integration of *both* passionate creativity *and* rational form through the creation of his own aesthetic ethos.

Raphael's work reflects the concomitant currents of *both* passion *and* rationality—neither reducible to, nor a synthesis of each. His mastery of the human form does not subjugate the brush strokes and colors bringing each piece to life. The passion brought forth by Raphael's vision runs free at the same time as it is propelled forward by the portrait's form (Forcellino, 2012). The beauty and sacredness of Rafael's paintings are rooted in what the biography heralds as *both* his passion for and acceptance of the present moment *and* a methodological attention to the development of an artistic practice. But, importantly, this practice did not identify or regurgitate particular values, customs, and rules of representation of the time, but instead, cultivated its own ascetic ideal.

In some ways, then, Raphael's work is difficult to classify from an art history perspective. But, as Forcellino emphasizes, it is precisely this inability to categorize Raphael's work that points to its exceptional sacredness—in a manner vastly different from the suffering portrayed as the inspirational force of artists, such as Michelangelo (Forcellino, 2012). Life can be affirming and positive within an ethos of life as a work of art, which wills itself beyond the subjecting power/knowledge relations of the everyday through an acceptance and revelry in the world around us, as it is.

What was innovative about Rafael's approach is that he refused taken-for-granted identities and iconography. Instead, he brought each individual to life as a singularity, through careful and creative expression of individual psychology. He gave space and sanctity to each body and avoided forced reproductions that served only to "make a painting recognizable" (Forcellino, 2012, p. 51). This mirrors consultants' focus on understanding "who is my client" on each engagement—treating the client as his/her own singularity and as a "Thou" to get to know.

Rafael captured the beauty, good, and sacredness of the life around him. This was not to ignore the great violence, greed, and horrors against humanity around him, particularly during Pope Alexander Borgia's reign of terror (Forcellino, 2012). But, rather, Raphael inspired people to see the weakness of such acts and strategies in the face of the comparative strength of *both* the everyday *and* religious portraits he crafted. This doesn't make the horrors of his time any less real, but it takes away the potential for sedimenting pain, loss, and fear and inspires hope, love, and compassion—for what we believe in, in some respects, becomes real in the plane of power/knowledge relations we have established in this text.

Raphael, like the management consultants of this study, found his success dependent upon positive client interactions and professional reputation (Forcellino, 2012, p. 48). Professionalism is the methodological balance of meeting best practices (rational form) and injecting interpersonal flavor (creative passion) in order to craft unique relationships, which thereby provide a competitive advantage. The effect is that professionalism, as an action rather than attribute, becomes imbricated in the price-value equation structuring management consulting work.

One consulting executive went so far as to describe the team-based consulting environment as an “apprenticeship model.” Similar to the ways in which Raphael established artist workshops to help meet client demands and relied upon word-of-mouth referrals, consulting teams are “the most important resource for tools, best practices, techniques, methodology.” This partner remarked upon the intense pressure to learn quickly and expressed gratitude that he was “fortunate enough to work with a lot of really good people my first one to two years.” He attributes his current success to these positive and informative early consulting team experiences.

Implications

If power is a strategic relation, then our attitude toward life and the people around us holds the *potentia* for “making real.” If we believe in lack, evil, and constraint, then that is what we manifest. If we believe in love, goodness, and capacity, then that is what we spread. What becoming ethos would we hold for our self and Others? Is it a spirit of play, forgiveness, and power-full affect? Or, is it a power-full affection that prevents action—an affection so overcome by the ill effects of a moralized wrong that it helps us forget it is just a construction of a construction?

In 10th grade, I played the role of Dorothy in my high school’s production of *The Wizard of Oz*. Now, in thinking about the ramifications of power/knowledge relations on the becoming processes of self, I am drawn back to Dorothy’s fictional journey. Just as Dorothy finally realizes, I think it is important to note that we have never lost our power—as soulless robots, professional consultants, or fairy tale princesses with glass slippers. We’ve had it all along.

Power has always been inside us—as constructions of self are manifestations of knowledge and consciousness that are inextricable from capacities to affect and be affected (power). We are never separated and can never be separated from the power that constructs our very existence. There is no end to the intersecting planes of power/knowledge through which we know and make sense of who we are within the world around us.

I realize this sounds trite—the whole Dorothy and the "power is inside us" bit. But, moving beyond the commodity economy of self-help mantras, this is a philosophical positioning of the self within power/knowledge relations that affords a new way of conceptualizing organizing practices, including occupation as method. This perspective assesses based on a capacity for affect rather than fixation on an illusory, unstable identity that is constantly subject to the currents of rationality, passion, and power/knowledge relations. The battle to overcome that which would fix our identity attributes or essence is important to realizing and developing a technique and ethic which holds the *potentia* for crafting life as action rather than reaction—or worse, inaction. As a result, human ontology is resuscitated from the stagnating affects of the question of "who are we?" by refocusing on capacity—"what do we *do*?" This is particularly important for realizing the powerful potential of organized collectives, such as occupations.

The key to constructing life as a work of art, then, involves the development of an ethic (a philosophy of life, if you will) that engages and overcomes the forces constantly working to sediment constructions of self—weak forces that would revel in the incapacity of a body, or the inability to act because of fixed identifications. Life as a work of art involves a recognition that constructions of self constantly battle articulations of power/knowledge, some of our own making, some not of our own making. Becoming processes of self are predicated upon actions, rather than attributes. Identity work is a series of never-ending actions, rather than an achieved property or possession. As a result, the collective holds more power for positive action when theorized as method (active), rather than identity (reactive). The collective should not be conceptualized as an incorporation of singularities, with fixed attributes. A theoretical conceptualization of occupation as method, rather than incorporated essence, resists reductions of power to embodied attributes and focuses attention on the capacity for political love.

Accepting that our selves are neither victims nor sovereigns, forgiving that the world is as it is, and promising to share the *potentia* of action with "Thous"—this is political love. It is a love that offers hope not for a different world, but a different world-*consciousness* for what it means to be human in our contemporary world. Then, work—corporate or otherwise—becomes just one other dimension and context for becoming processes that is inextricable from human ontology.

A *both-and* perspective proposes that the world is *both* all of that which we can know (consciousness), *and* more than we can ever possibly know (unconsciousness). As we can never completely understand this *potentia*, judgments about the inherent good or evil of actions/existence are illusory and misrepresentative (we can never have all the information, nor understand the long-lasting impacts of an action). For Nietzsche (1969), this is a love of fate:

> My formula for greatness in a human being is amor fati: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it—all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary—but love it. (p. 258)

Life is a series of actions upon actions and the ethic—attitude and method—of navigating these forces and interactions affects the power/knowledge relations shaping who we are and how we position our selves within the world.

What we are left with as a point of analysis is whether or not those actions increase a body's potential for affecting/being affecting (good) or decrease/subsume a body's potential for affecting/being affecting (bad). The goal, then, becomes about being open in the present moment to those positive life forces that facilitate productive, collaborative, life-affirming activities. Life as a work of art *both* constrains our interests, standpoints, and interpretations *and* provokes ruptures that challenge everyday, taken-for-granted patterns, routines, and scripts through positivity. We are not "dead men working." We are part of an enlivened and inspired becoming. Whether as singular affects or through collective methods, we do not know what a body can do, as Spinoza so aptly argued. Embrace that *potentia*—not because of an inherent lack carried within a hope for the world as otherwise, but for the compelling artistry of self as power/knowledge relations in the present moment.

From an occupational perspective, we do not know the long-term (or, even the short-term) affects of the work management consultants perform. Perhaps because of this, the stories about this line of work tend to be imbued with negativity, greed, and immorality. The answer to recreating a different "life as a work of art" sketch for the occupation, for one consulting partner, is communication. Regarding the management consulting industry:

> It is a kind of commercial activity that has been recognized for many decades now. So, as professional services firms go, if that's the case and it's been a commercially relevant enterprise and people have been able to talk to clients about their needs and have addressed their needs and have charged money for it and sold repeat business to those clients—then, I challenge the concept that it is snake oil or is in some way not as legitimate as another product or service that is more tangible and might have a more directly evident value. Unfortunately, there is no direct connection—the way it gets transferred into money or hits the streets outside of the organization. We as consultants need to do a better job of communicating how our advice impacts our clients.

The contributions this project makes in terms of critical organizational studies is not in its analysis and rejection of subjectifying, ideological, or alienating forces of which management consulting professionalism engenders. Instead, the becoming activities of professional management consultants offer a compelling argument for a critical ethos—one in which the gifts of the present challenging moments are faced squarely, positively, courageously, and addressed collaboratively and democratically through integrative partnerships with clients and colleagues. Taken at face value, consultant comments about what they "get" out of professionalism include desires, aspirations, and commitments beyond financial and material rewards. While popular press descriptions of consultants are one-dimensional stereotypes, this project brings in a constellation of *both-and* spotlights from which to view the everyday work of management consultants.

In combining theoretical concepts from Foucault, Nietzsche, and Spinoza, the organizing work of professionalism in management consulting takes on new meaning within the landscape of power/knowledge relations established in Chapter Three. The power of an individual or collective body is inextricable from other forces and bodies in the world. Focusing on the life-enhancing capacities for change, affect, and power inspires all bodies to act in life-enhancing manners. A "life as a work of art" ethos does not deny the existence of life-detracting forces, such as occupational segregation, but does not become rooted in fixed identities, portraits, attributes, or other identity markers as its essence. Because there are no limits to the ways in which the self is constituted through intersections of power/knowledge relations (including those forces which work to fix identities) and the universe is constantly in motion (Spinoza, 1996), our human essence is unknowable. Therefore, balancing passion, rationality, and our capacities for affecting (action) and being affected (feeling) in any given present moment is the only key we have to gaining self understanding and realizing the power-full capacities inseparable from all of Nature.

Management consulting work lends itself to a "life as a work of art" ethos, in some ways. Management consulting professionalism requires actions that masterfully blend rationality and passion in order to craft long-term, forward-directed, action-oriented, and collaborative partnering with clients to address various business needs. The becoming activities of professional consultants evoke both violence and pleasure in everyday life. Through modes of subjectivation, impacts to a person's ethical substance, and various means for self-development, consultants mold, stretch, and adapt to firm, client, and occupation expectations for the embodiment and enactment of professionalism. The challenges of this identity work jeopardize integrity, values, upbringings, relationships, and desires. Yet, the consultants of this study are smart and engaged persons. The risks, dangers, and potential for self-degradation are evident to them. By taking a "life as a work of art" approach to studying management consulting professionalism, this study was able to illuminate the teleologies of consultants, which undermine assumptions that consultants are only motivated by money and prestige. Such desires as collaborative and creative partnering and being a part of something bigger illustrate the powerful potential of articulations of power/knowledge in occupational lines of work.

Consultants enjoy being a part of a collective that is smart, engaged, active, positive, and eager to step up to challenges. Surrounding one's self with this qualitative potential for affect enhances the potential for making positive contributions with the client and builds one's own strength. This is part of why I argue that organizational studies would benefit from more analyses focused on occupation as method, rather than occupation as attribute/identity marker. Focusing on the qualitative *potentia* of occupational action realizes the affective potential of the power/knowledge relations through which the occupation is constructed. Some of the techniques identified, which I have given labels based upon consultant accounts, include: sacred dialogue, the gift, the promise of forgiveness, and integration. Engaging in these practices makes positive use of the power-full capacities occupations are afforded by the combined, yet singular, and diverse strengths of its participants and contributes to the creation of loving institutions and experiences for all.

Postface

I have painted a particular picture by piecing together various puzzle pieces related to discourse, power, knowledge, self, and management consulting professionalism. But, now it is time for me to step aside. Just like viewing any piece of art, interpretation rests in the eye of the beholder. What do you see in the becoming activities of professional management consultants? How are you affected? As the sketch is unfinished, what actions are needed to contribute to this landscape portrayal of the organizing work of professionalism?

You might be wondering, "How is this not another attempt at harnessing people's hierarchy of higher needs through human resource management?" There are certainly ways in which firm, self, Other (client), and occupational commitment capitalize on people's "good nature." But, my theoretical and personal commitment is to take individual accounts as indicative ruptures. It does not matter if participant responses are "true," ideologically motivated, warped due to the alienating effects of neoliberalism, or constrained by the maintenance of professionalism within the interview process. Participant accounts challenge the taken for granted concept of professionalism by complicating how becoming processes of professional selves work.

While the information could be used as data to develop professionalism training courses or codes of conduct in management consulting firms, this was not my intention. What I have attempted to do is complicate control-resistance, good-bad consultant, autonomous-alienated worker portrayals by showcasing the gray area—the "*both-and*" in identification work. An important contribution in this regard is that occupational identity work is nuanced, contradictory, and resists easy categorization. The "use value" of this research is in keeping threads unraveled so that Others can join the discussion.

Life as a Work of Art: The Becoming of Professional Management Consultants

This project is a developing work of art, in its own right, as there are many constraints shaping the picture portrayed here. First, as this is part of my doctoral studies, there are time constraints and normative conventions guiding the study construction and presentation. I focus mostly on the becomings of singular management consultants and the potential for collective action, but have not provided sufficient attention to the important effects of firm dynamics. For IRB efficiency, I did not link consultant experiences to their respective firms. I do believe this would be a helpful dynamic to explore more thoroughly. What role have consulting firms specifically played in becoming processes of self? How do inter-firm dynamics within the industry shape what it means to be a professional management consultant culturally, personally, and on-site at the client? More insight is needed in terms of the ways in which inter-firm market dynamics impact expectations of professionalism. How do professionalism expectations of major firms compare with that of niche firms? Does the reputation of big firms impact the client-consultant relationship niche firm consultants experience day-to-day?

I also look forward to exploring in more detail the practices involved in an occupation as method approach to studying management consulting professionalism. More specifically, two works may provide additional insights into the utility of rationality, passion, and action in client-consultant exchanges. Adam Smith's, *The Wealth of Nations,* explores the gains from trade, which may develop "the gift" section as an integration of self-Other relations. Additionally, Smith's exploration of human self-interest in, *Theory of Moral Sentiments,* may offer a perspective of social order predicated upon activity. In a different, but related trajectory, I would like to explore the relationship between Adorno's negative dialectics and Mary Parker Follett's notion of integration in both concepts' refusal of the traditional synthesis required of dialectical tension. Combined, these works may enable me to further develop the ideas presented in this text more explicitly within capitalist transactions.

Thirdly, a participant noted the following: "you're asking consultants to speak about professionalism. So, you're going to get conversations where people want to keep that professionalism up throughout the conversation." Perhaps broadening the study overview to focus more on "becoming a management consultant" and less on "studying professionalism" would have made it more comfortable for consultants to talk about broader impacts of professionalism outside of work, as well as differential challenges to professionalism expectations (e.g., race, gender, sexuality). To a certain extent, I believe these issues are considered "not in good taste" to talk about in a formal interview. That is to say, the unprofessional is difficult to get at because it is not considered professional or socially acceptable to talk about these things when representing firms whose business model relies upon reputation and prestige. My former experience as a consultant likely *both* facilitated the conversation in some ways *and* constrained it in others. Knowledge about my own consulting experiences may have influenced some participant responses and opened up conversations that we may not have had otherwise.

Lastly, my interview questions did not delve deeply enough into the ways in which professionalism factors into the fixing of social identity markers, such as gender, race, age, and sexuality. More research is needed into this area at both micro- and macro-levels to understand differential experiences in and access to management consulting work. A first step to this end would be to go back through my transcriptions to analyze what consultants say in our conversations that may point to what they feel is most salient about their own identities. Are there topics in which participants self identify (e.g., “as a woman” or “as a recent graduate”) that may point to ruptures in or challenges to taken-for-granted professionalism expectations? Do these salient identity markers indicate tensions in managing professionalism contradictions? Baxter’s (2004) work on relational dialectics and “aesthetic moments of relating” (p. 187) that can provide temporary syntheses of similarity and difference may be instructive in this regard.

That being said, I already have been surprised by the interest this project has generated in participants and their firms. I believe this is where my work can make a significant intervention within the management consulting industry, and perhaps corporate work more broadly. One participant confided that he really enjoyed the interview because “just talking through and answering questions of this nature helped me think through things that normally I wouldn’t.” By sharing both the pleasures and pains of management consulting professionalism and rethinking who we are in the world, I hope readers will reconsider *both* the ways in which they care for themselves and Others *and* the love and courage that are inherent to work activities, corporate or otherwise. In this way, the joy of affecting and being affected in this world are carried forward.

For future interviews to further develop this research program, I would revise my interview questions to address these nuances more directly. For example, I could ask, “how is professionalism *both* constraining *and* facilitative to your professional identity?” Or, “what are the contradictions you see in becoming a professional management consultant?” Similarly, questions such as, “how do you feel when you act professional? And, how do you feel when you resist professionalism expectations?” could more explicitly engage power/knowledge intersections. Providing opportunities for participants to put contradictory experiences in conversation with each other might facilitate more nuanced "*both-and*" understandings of organizational life.

Additionally, I would like to continue exploring the tensions around how management consulting professionalism is learned. Some consultants attribute professionalism to innate personality traits, while others say professionalism is emulated or developed through training. One potential project in this regard is to speak with consultants about the first person they remember as a mentor in the firm. It would be interesting to explore the client-consultant relationship in relation to firm consultant-executive relationships. When consultants speak about creating loving relationships with their clients, what factors into this process? Is it a personal value socialized from familial units or educational programs? Is it an inherent will to power? How does emulation of mentors set expectations for the client-consultant relationship?

Yet, I would leave you with a gentle reminder that a genealogy of the self is always necessarily incomplete. Furthermore, human existence is *both* incomplete *and* perfect as it stands today. As we have seen in management consultant experiences of becoming professional, ethical substance, self-forming activities, modes of subjectivation, and teleologies will change, adapt, and conform within myriad fields of possibilities. Some will increase our capacity to affect, while others will reduce our potential to affect Others. This is what "life as a work of art" is all about.

Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. Please tell me about how you got started in management consulting and the specific kinds of work you do.

2. What is enjoyable about being professional as a management consultant? What is difficult?

3. What does it mean to be professional as a management consultant? How did you learn what it means to be professional as a management consultant?

4. What kinds of activities do you engage in to develop and/or maintain professionalism as a management consultant?

5. What challenges have you faced regarding professionalism as a management consultant?

6. What surprises you about management consulting professionalism expectations? Have these professionalism expectations affected you in unexpected ways either at work or outside of work?

7. Would you be willing to share an example of a time in which you observed professionalism? What did you think about that situation? How did it affect the way you thought about professionalism? How might it have changed your own behavior?

8. Would you be willing to share an example of a time in which you observed unprofessionalism? How did you respond? What did you think about that situation? How did it affect the way you thought about professionalism? How might it have changed your own behavior?

9. Have you or any of your colleagues been told to handle something more professionally? What did you take away from that experience?

10. Are there things you would do or say differently, if professionalism expectations were different at your firm or client site? Would you mind sharing an example?

11. (for former management consultants) How has your understanding of management consulting professionalism shaped your life since leaving the firm? How has it shaped your work/employment since leaving the firm?

12. (for former management consultants) What aspects of your management consulting experience do you feel your current employer values?

Appendix B: Preliminary Insights

Kiely Flanigan

Descriptive statistics:

- Number of firms represented by participant consulting experiences: 17
- Number of consultants interviewed: 32
  - 14 former, 18 current
  - 12 women, 20 men

Preliminary findings:

1. Professionalism is crucial to firm reputation and consultant success in management consulting.

2. A certain aesthetic of professionalism is part of the package being bought by clients. Professionalism adds value to client deliverables and relationships.

3. The day-to-day activities of management consultants in global business operations and policies reflect consultants' influential and understated, yet engrained, role in how major organizations function in today's economy.

4. Management consulting professionalism is a work of art. Philosophically, it blends self-forming activities, obligatory practices, and aspirations/ideals. Practically, it involves crafting a particular way of being involving bodily comportment, dress, language, mannerisms, and emotional intelligence. Management consulting professionalism is dependent upon savvy interpersonal communication/relationship skills in order to quickly develop credibility and trust.

5. Becoming a professional management consultant is complicated and contradictory. On the one hand, the means and methods of becoming professional are all-consuming and bleed into home/personal life—shaping how one acts with friends/family members/community. On the other hand, who consultants are at work is different and separate from who consultants are outside of work—what is professional and normative at work would seem unnatural outside of work contexts.

6. Management consulting professionalism becomes archived in consultant bodies, behavior, and communicative practices. You can pick out a former consultant anywhere.

7. Management consulting professionalism is an embodied, sensory experience. Consultants are always "on." The gaze of clients, managers/partners, and colleagues is both pleasurable (empowering, motivational) and painful (constant evaluation and feedback).

8. Violations of management consulting professionalism expectations are memorable when they occur. The rarity of unprofessionalism suggests professionalism expectations are either already known (a reflection of upbringing, innate personality traits, prior corporate experience and/or targeted university recruiting strategies) and/or quickly assimilated (through observation, training, and/or mentoring) when consultants start at a firm. However,

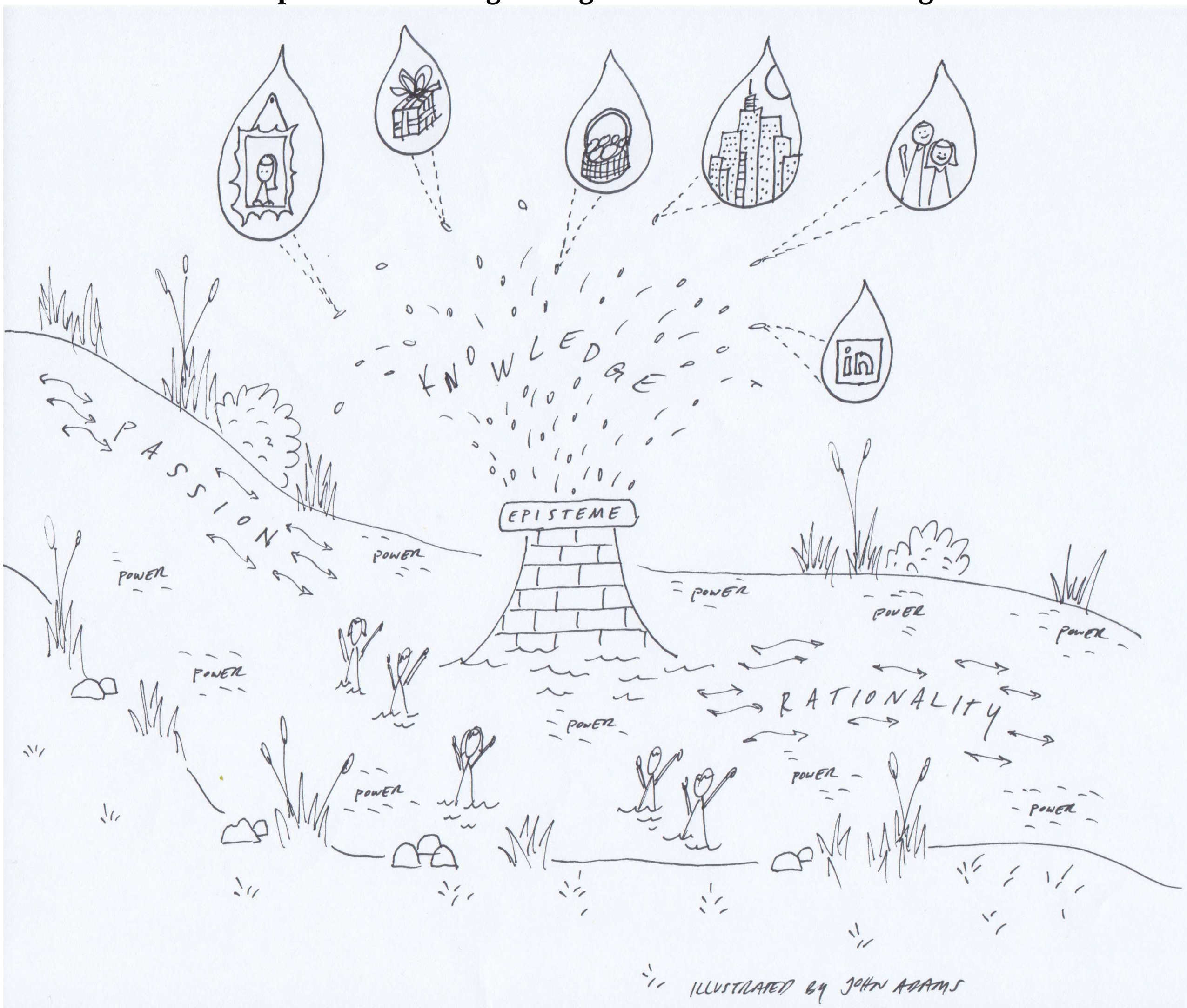
when acts of unprofessionalism do occur, they are often linked to individual explanatory demographics, such as age, gender, level in hierarchy, and/or tenure with firm.

9. Research (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003; Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007) suggests United States professionalism is synonymous with performances of middle-age, white, heterosexual masculinity. While several participants (male and female) brought up the challenges women and young team members face in terms of meeting expectations of professionalism, participants did not bring up race or sexuality.

10. Contrary to contemporary characterizations of corporate work (and, particularly, management consulting) as soulless and robotic, consultant stories about management consulting professionalism included aspirations, pay-offs, and challenges centered around: helping, courage, fun, love, joy, relational intimacy, intellectual stimulation, excitement, fulfillment, gratitude, and inspiration. This moves beyond stereotypical representations of consultants and recasts their work experiences in a different light. This also suggests there is intrinsic, personal value to professionalism.

11. On the other hand, management consulting professionalism expectations can affect negatively: the body (requires homogeneity in terms of style, dress, mannerisms), emotions, outside relationships, family planning, approachability, personal authenticity, innovation (low tolerance for mistakes or anything other than “best practices”) and the ability to have a voice in and/or challenge decisions.

Appendix C:
An Episteme: The Organizing Work of Power/Knowledge



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