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**Identity Construction of Young Professionals in a Late Modern  
Emotion-Intensive Context:  
Multiple Faces of Family Discourse in a Big Four Auditing Firm**

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## **ABSTRACT**

- Title:** Identity Construction of Young Professionals in a Late Modern Emotion-Intensive Context: Multiple Faces of Family Discourse in a Big Four Auditing Firm
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- Five key words:** identity construction, emotional labor, psychological contract, work-life balance, knowledge-intensive work
- Purpose:** The purpose of this thesis is to study the adaptation of recently recruited young professionals to a top consulting firm through their identity construction efforts. We analyze the influence of a major organization-related discourse on young professionals in order to account for the effects of emotional labor on their adaptation to work.
- Methodology:** We have studied our empirical material in the light of a reflexive pragmatic approach. Thus throughout the analysis of interview material, we try to interpret carefully the material from various perspectives. As authors, we also reflect critically upon our own interpretations. We believe that studying empirical material in reflexive pragmatic manner checks, to a certain extent, the effect of language, vocabulary, power and culture embedded in the empirical material.

**Theoretical perspectives:** Our theoretical framework consists of four main pillars. We refer to late modernity and reflexive modernization theories when we study the context of knowledge-intensive firms. In order to sharpen our focus on knowledge-intensive work, we use theories on emotional labor, esthetic labor and psychological contract. Constructionist identity theories with an emphasis on discourses provide us with our main analytical leverage. Theories on micro-emancipation and discursive resistance practices enrich our analysis with critical points.

**Empirical foundation:** Empirical material is generated through a qualitative technique, interviews, where open-ended questions are directed to one interviewee at a time by two interviewers. Our sample consists of seven young professionals in a Swedish branch of a Big Four accountancy firm.

**Conclusions:** Keeping our purpose in mind, we arrive at two major conclusions. First, we observe that emotional and esthetic labor are significant practices for knowledge-intensive service sectors, such as accountancy firms. Even though they enhance motivation and productivity, these kinds of labor lead to specific forms of exploitation. Second, we point out that family discourse facilitates adaptation of young professionals to their work contexts. We argue that this discourse has influences on non-work spheres of life as well.

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# CHAPTER 1: Introduction

## 1.1. Background

In late modern postmaterial<sup>1</sup> societies, improvements in transportation, communication and information technologies accelerate globalization, undermine the significance of localities, and increase the demands over time. As a result, space shrinks and time expands. These global changes in postmaterial societies correlate with the emergence of a new form of work organization, a 'knowledge-intensive firm'. Even though they employ around ten to fifteen percent of workforce, they are important actors in society and they are claimed to double these figures in a couple of decades (Thompson et al. 2001, quoted in Alvesson 2004: 9). The new organizational form downplays organizational hierarchy and authorities' control while entrusting individuals with relatively high autonomy. Thus devoid of the mediums of direct supervision, managerial regulations depend on symbolic and rhetorical forms of control – including the attempts to construct or influence organizational culture, discourse and values. In addition, Alvesson (2004) claims that 'identity regulation' has been introduced as a means of organizational control. He further explains that, in the context of knowledge intensive firms where highly skilled professionals perform complicated work tasks autonomously, supervisory functions are even redundant and futile as to evaluate the performance and to measure outcome of knowledge work is not feasible due to ambiguity inherent in this kind of work. Therefore, in the absence of direct bureaucratic control, it is important that employees have the 'appropriate' culture, values and identity so that they can manage themselves in line with the organization's interests and preferences.

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<sup>1</sup> The theory of postmaterialism refers to Maslow's hierarchy of human goals and it suggests that ongoing transformation of individuals and society resolve quite successfully economic scarcities and liberates the individuals from the stress of basic acquisitive or materialistic needs. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmaterialism>, reached on June 8, 2008)

In postmaterial welfare (or post-welfare) societies, wealth is more evenly distributed. Money thus ceases to be the most significant incentive to promote commitment and loyalty to work organization. Moreover, changes in demographical trends decrease the ratio of working population and promote a less competitive labor market – at least for knowledge-intensive sectors in postmaterial societies. Consequently, economic incentives have lost their attractiveness while knowledge professionals have gained more bargaining power. Knowledge-intensive organizations thus aspire to retain their employees by gaining their commitment through symbolic, rhetorical or emotional means. Brown and Duguid (2001) further suggest, based on the paradox of stickiness and leakiness metaphor, that knowledge within an organization is not an asset that falls within its boundaries. Rather than productively flowing within the organization, knowledge is more likely to move out of the organization. In consequence, commitment is a crucial resource that organizations try to foster in order to share knowledge within the firm and to prevent it from leaking out of the firm.

Knowledge intensive work requires a great degree of intellectual and symbolic skills (Alvesson 2004). Knowledge professionals work with meaning, understanding and emotion (Bunting 2004). They are not only expected to perform intellectual tasks, but they are also required to handle soft skills (e.g. presentation skills) and people skills (e.g. communication and negotiation skills). Therefore, although knowledge workers have more autonomy and freedom to handle their work tasks, the extent of their work is expanded and their tasks multiplied. They are expected to commit themselves to their workplace and manage themselves in performance of their work.

In the postmaterial contexts of late modernity, material needs of most people have been met. The implications comprise – at least, claimed – decrease of the importance of work and the ascendance of other life aspirations. Knowledge-intensive firms, especially top consulting firms, are among the most attractive workplaces among newly graduated students and they hire ‘the best and the brilliant’ among them – even though the salaries these organizations pay are not the highest possible for these top graduates. Instead, these organizations offer a more diverse range of benefits including the prestige of working at a high-status organization.

## 1.2. Problem Discussion

In the late modern era, managerial practices focus on managing their employees from the inside such as through their values, aspirations and emotions in addition to more mainstream managerial tools and techniques such as performance measurements, career assessments, reward and sanctions etc. The underlying presumption is that identity management will lead to employee commitment which enhances performance and efficiency in the organization. Indeed, “managers have been exhorted to develop strong culture in which people identify with organizational purpose (Deal and Kennedy, 1982), to develop leadership styles with which followers can identify (Semler, 1993) and to develop strong in-group ties in teams (Katzenbach and Smith 1993) such that there is peer group identification (Beech and McInnes 2005:23)” – or to develop discourses that provide meaning to organizational collectivity.

(Self-) management of identity in work contexts combines the identity construction efforts of the employee with the influences of discourses provided by work and non-work life spheres alike. The work-related discourses support the construction of commitment-promoting identities as an attempt at identity management. To the extent that their identities are constructed in terms of organizational contexts, employee commitment may facilitate the adoption of or even legitimize exploitive practices, such as overwork. Organizations strive to influence identity construction of the employees through the promotion of discourses that provide a vocabulary to express values and emotions. However, these discourses and their vocabulary have political implications in the sense that they contribute to the empowerment or vice versa of the employee. Thus, commitment to workplace and colleagues may establish such exploitive practices not as mere employee responsibilities but as an element of organizational culture. Moreover, in her qualitative study on Swedish identity construction, Wieland (2007) highlights that organizational influences over identity construction of employees do not only exert influence on their values and choices at work, but also on their values and choices in non-work contexts.

However, being more demanding in time, energy and commitment, the organizations do not allow for a fair conversion of contribution to pay. For instance, Bunting (2004), based on her field study on overwork culture at Microsoft’s UK, points out that money and job security are no

longer used as a motivation to drive the employees to work hard. Rather, the organizations offer what she calls 'psychological contract'. They provide for a range of emotional needs in return to their employees' hardworking. In more detail, psychological contract claims to serve the employees' need to be recognized as an individual, and provide them with identity, purpose and meaning in their work life. More specifically, Murlis and Schubert (2002) conclude that:

“Getting engaged performance is not just about investing financially in employees through pay and benefit increases. It is about striking a new contract in which the organization invests emotionally in its workforce. In exchange, employees make a similar emotional investment, pouring their 'discretionary effort' into their work and delivering superior performance. The new contract says, 'we'll make your job (and life) more meaningful. You give us your hearts and minds' (Murlis and Schubert 2002:5)”

Furthermore, Ciulla (2000) argues that the phenomenon is problematic. She points out the negative side of psychological contract which is related to issues of economic and political power. She claims that psychological contract leads to the declining power of employees and job security and, the increase in pay inequality. Bunting (2004) further addresses that in account of psychological contract; employees are not only encouraged to devote their time and energy during working hours, but also their personal life outside of work. As a consequence of emotional investment and pressure from high competition, the employees tend to neglect their personal life, family or social life. Work consumes most of their time and there is not enough time left for non-work activities. It is not just part of their life, but work is taking on the whole of their life. What is interesting is maybe the 'shadow' of work identity on life – family, social relations and hobbies are defined in terms developed in work.

On the same page, Collinson (2003) claims that as a consequence of declination in religious influence, career has become a means for people to validate one's success. He even calls the phenomenon as a 'highly influential religion'. In addition, he introduces the concept of 'dual identity': He suggests that individuals can split their identity, one identity connected to their work and one identity that connected to their life outside of work. The individuals will try to construct a physiological wall between the two identities and then associate themselves to the identity outside of work as it is more stable and it is the real them. Thus, having a dual identity

help the employees to cope with stress from work. Collision further highlights that since the working environment is constantly changing, the identity that the employees develop outside of work, is a solid thing that they can hold on and relieve them from pressure of work. Indeed, the weakening of the wall between work and non-work identities may have more problematic outcomes for the employees.

We are interested in how identity enables and at the same time constrains workers in navigating work/life conflicts. Our study focuses on identity construction of young knowledge professionals. Referring to Wieland (2007), we primarily frame individual identity from an 'identity as subject position' in which individuals construct their identities out of interacting discourses which are inherently political. Alluding Beech and McInnes (2005), we emphasize the significance of inconsistencies and ambiguities of social context, dynamism in the self and the various identities of the self.

### **1.3. The Purpose of the Thesis**

In this essay, we study young professionals recently recruited (in 6 up to 24 months) to a top consulting firm with a focus on their adaptation to their new organizational context. Our main themes include identity construction of these young professionals and the (self-) management practices in work and non-work contexts. We deem it important to account for the interferences of organizational discourses on the identity construction of employees in both work and non-work contexts.

In addition, we wish to apply theories, mentioned in chapter three, to analyze and frame the evidence of the empirical finding. Together with theoretical aspects, we wish to compile the empirical data in the critical and reflective manner. Our ultimate aim is, therefore, to contribute to the studies of identity and work life-balance.

## **1.4. Research Questions**

Considering our problem and our purpose from a perspective framed by our background, we have come up with three research questions:

Question 1: What facilitates and what hinders adaptation and socialization of recently recruited young professionals into their knowledge-intensive work contexts?

Question 2: How does the work organization influence identity construction of the young professionals?

Question 3: In the process of adaptation to a new and challenging context, how do the individuals balance their work and non-work commitment and identities?

## **1.5. Limitations of the Study**

To focus on our chosen themes within limitations of time, space and other resources, we are obliged to limit ourselves in scope. The empirical part of this study is conducted in a Swedish branch of a Big Four auditing consulting firm by two international students. We lack the opportunity to enrich our sample with the introduction of other branches of the same firm or other Big Four firms in the same locality, let alone with a range of knowledge-intensive work contexts. As to the theoretical part, even though we try to expand our literature review across theories and disciplines, social constructionism emerges as the main pillar of this study. For instance, a further study from an interactionist perspective may contribute to our analysis.

## **1.6. Possible Contribution of This Study**

Analyzing identity construction in a knowledge-intensive context, we use the concept of ‘psychological contract’ to sharpen our focus. We study a particular form of emotional labor performed in our context through a work-rooted discourse. We argue for the significance of this

discourse not only in work contexts but in non-work contexts as well. We thus relate to the effects of work-rooted discourses on non-work identities.

Our contributions to the literature are on four points. First, we use the concepts of ‘emotional labor’ and ‘psychological contract’ of Bunting (2004) and we come up with the idea of emotional exploitation<sup>2</sup> in knowledge-intensive contexts, particularly in interaction with colleagues. Second, we propose a definition of professionalism in terms of emotional labor in colleague relations. Third, we observe a discourse that refers to both work and non-work life spheres and we thus criticize late modern claims about multiple identities in favor of quasi-unitary identities forged through such a unifying discourse. Lastly, we suggest the concept of ‘alienation from non-work life’ to account for the outcomes of emotional exploitation and quasi-unified identities.

## **1.7. Thesis Outline**

### Chapter 1 – Introduction

The first chapter introduces an overview of the subject and problem area. It mainly consists of background, problem discussion, the purpose of the thesis, research questions, limitations of the study, and possible contributions of this study.

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<sup>2</sup> We use the term exploitation not in the everyday sense with connotations to slavery and other grave crimes of humanity but as a technical term. Our assumption is that if an employee is not rewarded according to his/her contribution to the production, the surplus labor that he/she exercises but he/she is not remunerated for constitutes the basis of his/her exploitation. In our case, the usage of ‘emotional exploitation’ refers to emotional labor that is productive in knowledge-intensive contexts, but that is not recognized nor remunerated.

## Chapter 2 – Methodology

The second chapter discusses research methodology. It outlines the design of the study, generation of empirical material in interview contexts and interpretation of this material. In sum, the chapter aims to describe and clarify the logic of the study.

## Chapter 3 – Theoretical frame of reference

The third chapter outlines the main theoretical framework used in this research. The theories are used as guiding assumptions to approach to empirical material and to construct a preliminary perspective for analyzing and explaining the empirical findings in the fifth chapter. The specific contributions of these theories are presented in the form of propositions that are integrated into Chapter 5.

## Chapter 4 – Case description

The fourth chapter introduces the case study of the research. Global, national, sectoral, organizational and professional contexts are accounted for in order to give a vivid image of the specific case context.

## Chapter 5 – Case analysis

The fifth chapter applies the theories highlighted in the third chapter to the empirical findings. The findings are interpreted based on critical and reflective perspective presented in the methodology section. The interplay of theories and our contribution to them is substantiated with the inclusion of quotes from and references to our empirical material.

## Chapter 6 – Conclusion

The final chapter compiles insights and arguments developed throughout the study. The main contributions of the empirical material are interpreted through theories and our own considerations are included. Consequently our research questions are answered and our purpose fulfilled.

## **CHAPTER 2: Methodology**

We start our methodology by an account of our perspective in terms of our perception of reality and our contentions about its intelligibility. After presenting our reflexive pragmatic approach, we continue by describing our sample and delineating the process of generation of empirical material. We conclude this chapter by arguing for the validity and reliability of our study.

### **2.1. Perspective: Ontology and Epistemology**

Our perception of reality and our assumption about the probability to ‘know’ this reality is threefold. First, we admit that even though constructed, context-dependent and elusive, there is a social reality ‘out there’. Otherwise, conducting interviews and studying the content of the interview text would be meaningless. Second, we think that this social reality is observable – however partial and flawed due to our necessarily limited perspectives and constant reconstruction of the material and researcher alike. Our assumptions, propositions and theoretical contributions are thus relevant at an interpreted level of reality restricted by the scope of our observations. Lastly, we act in a particular context but we recognize that similar contexts exist and our claims may thus be generalized to a certain extent. Indeed, we base our claims on a particular level and scope, however, we think that our theoretical contributions can have their bearings on more a general context.

### **2.2. Research Method: A Reflexive Pragmatic Approach**

Our main interest is in identity construction and meaning making of knowledge professionals within management consulting firms. We are aware of the uncertainty and fluidity of empirical material due to its relation to social context through language, vocabulary, power and culture. We refrain from sticking to a theory and applying this favorite of ours to the

empirical material. Rather, we refer to a plurality of theoretical perspectives and we try to see multiple interpretations of the material at hand. Moreover, our aim is to explore our material rather than classifying or testing it according to a theory. Thus, our method not only consists of translation of a combination of elements from various theories, methods and approaches to our particular context but we also have an aspiration to contribute to theoretical material through the insights from our empirical material. Indeed, our approach favors elaborating and criticizing relevant theories with the ambition of developing them.

Hence, we find that a reflexive approach is suitable and able to accommodate our research in the sense that “a reflexive approach means working with a framework involving a set of potential lines of thinking and theoretical ideas for how to understand a subject matter, rather than a definitive theoretical formulation and privileged vocabulary for grasping it. (Alvesson 2003:14)” To elaborate, reflexive research has two crucial characteristics. The first element is careful and detailed interpretation. All empirical material obtained from the research, such as interview statements, are result of interpretation. Reality is not simply mirrored in research results. In turn, “this calls for the utmost awareness of the theoretical assumptions, the importance of language and pre-understanding, all of which constitute major determinants of the interpretation. (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000:5)” The second element is reflection that turns attention toward researchers and factors constructing them - such as society, cultural traditions and language. Thus, this calls for “the launching of critical self-exploration of one’s own interpretations of empirical material (including its construction) (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000:6).”

In the process, we are keen on scrutinizing continuously our own interpretations of the material. Given the fact that our politico-socio-cultural, linguistic, gender-related and educational particularities inevitably influence our position vis-à-vis our interviewees, we are curious about accounting for our personal effects on the contexts. Our preunderstandings will be constantly challenged and reframed in the process. Thus, from a pragmatic reflective stance, we acknowledge the importance of interview context but we are not bounded by only context-dependent approaches. We also take into account the power of discourses on interviewees as well as us, interviewers. In addition, we acknowledge that we may be constructing a particular

discourse during our interview situation through our selection of themes and wording of questions.

### **2.3. Sampling and Generation of Empirical Data**

Since we are studying identity construction processes of young professionals in a top consulting firm, our focus lies in the impressions and emotions of these individuals. As we are interested in the perspectives of our subjects and we recognize that our interpretative function as interviewers has a certain weight in this study, the qualitative method appears as appropriate. Moreover, as we mention above, our social constructionist ontological and epistemological convictions favor qualitative method.

In this study, we use interviews to gather empirical material about the identity construction of young professionals. We are convinced that interview work which allows face-to-face interactions between the researchers and the interview subjects is suitable to our perspective in the sense that in addition to verbal interaction, we can also observe the interview subjects in different dimensions regarding their gestures, emotions, tone of voice and dress code. These elements help us to enhance our understanding of their social contexts and contribute to our study on identity.

To reach to the individuals we are to interview, we contacted the student coordinator for Lund University and he recommended us available employees from this particular branch. All of our interviewees are young professionals recently employed by the organization between 6 to 24 months. We are convinced that our sample is quite representative of the organization demography. The female-male ration is five to two, slightly biased in favor of females. Most of our interviewees are from accountancy division, yet legal division is also represented. Our interviewees are from different social and educational backgrounds. Moreover, they exhibit a range of previous work experience. We feel particularly lucky with our sample as our interviewees are balanced along the complacent-critical axis. In other words, we have both praises and critiques.

We had appointments with our interviewees a couple of weeks in advance. Each interview situation consists of one interviewee and a constant pair of interviewers. We hold the interviews in a conference room of the organization where both our interviewees and we were cozily accommodated. We were all quasi-informally dressed. Addressing to each other, we were also quasi-informal. The interviews took approximately between 30-60 minutes. The interviewees were not asked to be prepared about any specific interview topic. Before interviews, we had offered to send information if there were demands for more information regarding our thesis or interview at hand. However, no such demand was presented to us. We started each interview by introducing ourselves and briefly presenting our topic and objectives. The interview subjects were also informed that their responses would be kept anonymous.

We derived the interview theme and interview questions from our theoretical approach and research questions. All of our questions are open-ended questions that allow the interviewee to express himself/herself in an unrestricted manner. The interview starts by asking general questions about the backgrounds of interviewees and about the organization in order to promote social closeness through education and thus to promote smooth communication between us and the interviewees. Indeed, most of our interviewees are recent graduates from economics and business school, and most are from Lund University as well.

As the interview continues, the questions get more specific and they touch on more intimate and delicate issues – such as their social relations, opinions about the organization, and their plans about their work and lives. We finally conclude the interview by asking the interviewees whether there are any other questions that we did not bring up but they expect us to do so. This final question gives the interviewees an opportunity to express themselves outside the interview scope and to enrich our analysis with the inclusion of possibly overlooked points. Most importantly, because we believe that each interview guides our approach to the following interviews, we make sure that we ask their permission to have a further short follow-up interview in case we need their further clarification later.

The interview questions are divided into six sections including:

Grand tour Questions – In this section we ask the interviewees general questions about themselves and the organization. The focus is on their background, such as their field of

education and interests, as well as their motivation for working with this particular organization. By asking grand tour questions, we aim to familiarize ourselves with the interviewees and to make them feel comfortable with us as much as possible in such a short time. We thus try to establish a bond of confidence that helps our interviewees to share their personal opinions and feelings about their work and their life. In particular, we are interested in how the organization is conceived as an attractive workplace by the new recruits and how the interviewees construct their identities in the context of organization.

Expectations – In this section we are interested in studying work identities of our interviewees. We start by asking about the interviewees' routines and their responsibilities. We then ask the interviewees about their expectations about the organization before joining it. The new recruits are encouraged to talk about their expectations versus actual work experiences at the organization.

Working Time – In the third section, we ask the interviewees about their work hours; both standard working hours and the working hours that they actually spend at the workplace. We are interested in how identity work enables and constrains workers in navigating work/life conflicts, how it helps them to cope with high workload, and how it induces them to work hard.

Personal Life – In the fourth section, the focus of the questions is shifted from work sphere to non-work spheres. The interviewees are encouraged to talk about how they spend their free time such as their hobbies and social activities. The aim of the questions is to find out how the new recruits manage their life outside work. Most importantly, we wish to examine identity in non-work spheres. We are curious about how work exerts its influence on non-work life.

Work-Life Balance – The main theme of this fifth section is work-life balance. We aim to study how the new recruits manage their work and their personal life. Questions related to organizational culture or norms about overtime work phenomenon are also asked. Most importantly, we aim to study the outcome of identity work in the context of work-life balance, and how organizations affect identity construction.

Alternative accounts of life – In the last section, we start by asking questions about the interviewees' plans or dreams about mid-career breaks and retirement. However, based on our

responses we revised our focus towards the establishment of a family – as it seems to be a more short-term significant event for our young single professionals. The aim of such questions in this section is to try to study our empirical material through the lens of ‘identity projects’ so that the plans and dreams about the future may provide alternative identity narratives.

We voice-recorded all of our interviews. We listened to them afterwards and we transcribed parts relevant to our study. If we had to complete the sentences with the introduction of appropriate pronouns etc. or to translate gestural descriptions into words (e.g. a hand gesture signifying steps is written as [steps]) for the sake of rendering oral account more intelligible in writing, we use bracelets [] to mark our intervention. We also used brackets for occasional modes of expression (e.g. laugh or joke).

As we guarantee anonymity, we use alias for the organization and individuals throughout our study. We use colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet) for our interviewees and we name our organization ‘Rainbow’. The colors are assigned randomly and have no particular meaning as to their place in spectrum.

## **2.4. Validity**

As we study identity construction of young professionals, we hold that a knowledge-intensive organization provides us with a fertile context where individuals face challenging work and they need to actively construct their identities to adapt to their new situation. The reasons for this construction are twofold. First, the market for knowledge professionals is pretty competitive and the work organizations provide non-material incentives. They thus lure individuals to embrace discourses and values of the organization in order to ensure employee commitment. Second, the performance and the outcomes of this kind of work are ambiguous and difficult to measure. Then, employees construct an appropriate identity to deal with resulting insecurity.

Accounting and consulting service sector is among knowledge-intensive work contexts as professional employees perform not only intellectual work where they pass their informed judgements but also their work involves symbolic, rhetoric and emotional labor. In addition to

technical expertise, accounting and consulting services require integrity of professionals and trust of clients. A particular aspect of accounting and consulting firms is their close relation to laws and regulations. We argue that continuous reference to law may construct a frame and check ambiguity of their work to a certain extent.

The context of our empirical material is a Swedish branch of one of the global Big Four<sup>3</sup> accountancy and consultancy companies. We are international students foreign not only to accountancy and consultancy work but also to the national and local contexts of our study. Our distance allows us to be less embedded in social meaning systems in these contexts and to keep a fresh eye on our material, but it may also construct us as ‘foreign’ in a double sense. We acknowledge the particular significance of language since our interviewees as well as ourselves use a second language, English, as the medium of expression. On the one hand, this fact provides us with a form of equality vis-à-vis our interviewee as both parties are not speaking in their mother tongues but in a third language. On the other hand, mother tongue may be the least reflected medium of expression and we may risk to lose the primary responses of our interviewees as they deal with the issue of “How shall I put it?” However, our interviewees are particularly proficient in English. Except for a few instances where finding the ‘right’ word takes a few seconds or where descriptions follow to clarify the meaning, we do not think that the use of English flaws the quality of our empirical material.

Interview work is a socially and linguistically complex situation and we are aware of the drawbacks of using the interview as means to study identity. In relation to Alvesson’s claim that “if somebody is interviewed as a ‘woman’, a ‘leader’, and a ‘middle-level manager’, different identities are invoked, as well as different inclinations to interpret the entire interview situation and different specific questions and evaluations of what kinds of answers are appropriate. (Alvesson 2003:20)”, we acknowledge the possibility that our interviewees invoke the ‘Swedish’

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<sup>3</sup> “They are the four largest international accountancy and professional services firms, which handle the vast majority of audits for publicly traded companies as well as many private companies”: PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, Ernst & Young, and KPMG ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big\\_Four\\_auditors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Four_auditors), reached on June 8, 2008)

identity in interaction with us, international students from Turkey and Thailand or ‘young’ identity as it is our common point.

In order not to predestinate identities of our interviewees in fixed constructions of ‘woman/man’, ‘young Swedish’ or ‘successful professionals’, we refrain from asking questions directly addressing them as such. We are also aware that the interview situation itself is a micro-context of identity work for our interviewees and us alike. We try to keep a critical distance and perspective towards their statements so that we do not presume that our interviewees reveal their true selves or intimate convictions. Moreover, we conduct our interviews in a reflexive manner, questioning our perspectives and interpretations and always considering alternatives.

## **2.5. Reliability**

We admit that our particularities such as gender, nationality and educational background possibly have their impact on our conceptualization of identity as well as our perception of our interviewees and their organizations. We see these peculiarities not so much as potential biases but instead as factors that enrich our analysis. Thus, an additional study to check the reliability may not be an issue. Instead, a further study on the same theme may add other perspectives and fresh points.

## **CHAPTER 3: Theoretical Framework**

We begin to discuss the theoretical framework with an account of late modernity which is used as an overall context throughout our case analysis. We then narrow the discussion down to the context of contemporary workplace in which the concepts of emotional labor and psychological contract are introduced. Moreover, we discuss theories of identity including individual identity, multiple identities and social identification theory. We particularly study identity construction in knowledge-intensive firms with an emphasis on professionalism. We end the discussion by referring to the interplay between work and non-work spheres in the construction of identity.

### **3.1. Late Modernity**

Life in 21<sup>st</sup> century consists of overcomplex social interactions of overspecialized human beings. Interdependency has been extended and intensified at every level of social existence. Interpersonal and interorganizational transactions operate in local (face-to-face), national (nations as imagined communities, cf. Benedict Anderson) and global scales (an unfettered concept of humanity) – and not uncommonly, simultaneously in each. Communication technologies have rendered space insignificant for many kinds of interactions. Time has become the object of increasing claims of all sorts of human activity as space has lost its buffering function.

Alvesson (1990) points at the historical move away from self-referring meaningful human activities that have immediate effects on the actor and on his/her environment towards fragmented activities by specialized actors the results of which are rendered meaningful by mediation and communication. It is arguable that when it is shattered and fragmented, the interpretive mirror of reality loses its quasi-magical unity and normality. However diversified and complexified, the human understanding of reality thus becomes a more mundane phenomenon. Yet, Alvesson (1990: 379) hints at the fall of the self-evident unity of the social

world that has proliferated the meanings given to what is 'out-there'. He argues that "society's 'substantive' nature has been reduced", presumably relative to ephemeral and constructed socio-cultural patterns and their multiple meanings ascribed by discretionary understanding of human beings. This move towards fragmentation and dissolution of a unified social meaning translates into the contemporary work contexts as "motivation crises (Alvesson 1990: 381)".

*Proposition 1: The technological and social changes at the turn of century disrupt the illusion of a unique social meaning and foster the fragmentation of identities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Among other spheres of life, work also loses its meaningful as a part of a unitary whole and this meaninglessness causes motivation crises.*

In his study on time commitments in late modern 'lifestyle firms', Kuhn (2006: 1339) projects a modified version of reflexive modernization thesis on organization studies. The original argument of the thesis purports that socio-economic and technological changes have shattered and scattered wholesome individual identities embedded in the traditional structures. Thus, human beings have become responsible to "construct employable and flexible selves".

Kuhn (2006) contends that various currents in the reflexive modernization thesis refer to the causes and effects of late modernity. Decline of class as a significant theme in society, the individualism threatening even the nuclear family and the abundance of mass industrial products extend the span of choices for the human beings to realize themselves. Yet, on the other hand, these changes destruct the traditional institutional nets of safety that provide human beings with a legitimate unified social meaning to counter existential anxieties. In this context, complexified by the challenges of the new conceptualizations of time and space, individual, collective and organizational self-narratives compete to procure meaning to social realities and to gain legitimacy.

*Proposition 2: The decline of traditional identity narratives such as family and class urges the individuals to consciously construct their fragmented and multifaceted identities out of the competing narratives of different life spheres.*

*Proposition 3: Traditional unitary identity narratives are replaced by a multiplicity of amorphous, floating and ephemeral discourses that may challenge or complement each other.*

### **3.2. Contemporary Workplace**

As communication and transportation technologies improve, space loses its significance as a limiting factor to production and distribution. The spatial considerations undermined, time in workplace rises in importance as a prime factor of production. In a sense, time is intensified. The workers are expected to increase the depth and extent of their performance. They are not only induced to produce more in quantity and quality, but also more in labor categories. In this study, we will focus on two such demands in contemporary workplaces: emotional labor and the new psychological contract.

Based on the definition of Ashforth and Humphrey (1993: 89-93), we define emotional labor as the act of expressing socially desired emotions in work contexts, during interactions with peers, superiors or subordinates and with clients. Emotional labor differentiates between feeling genuine emotions in interactions, “simulating emotions that are not actually felt” i.e. surface acting and trying to “actually experience or feel the emotions that one wishes to display” i.e. deep acting. We claim that emotional labor is a contemporary factor of production appropriated and performed by the workers yet not acknowledged as a significant contribution not remunerated accordingly.

Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) hint at the potential clashes between organization and clients on the one side and the workers on the other side. They argue that even though it is an increasingly significant input enhancing task effectiveness, “emotional labor may trigger emotive dissonance and impair one's sense of authentic self (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993:89)”. Thus, we argue that emotional labor incites a new form of alienation of the worker.

*Proposition 4: Contemporary workplaces, especially knowledge-intensive service sectors, require the performance of emotional labor in interactions with colleagues and*

*clients. This recently acknowledged form of labor causes a previously unnoticed form of alienation.*

Bunting (2004) refers to the emergence of the concept of 'employer brand' in late modernity when the workers appreciated as 'internal customers' are encouraged to commit themselves to the values and culture of the organization. Contemporary human beings are subject to a shattered and fragmented social reality and Bunting (2004) contends that organizational initiatives to forge a brand culture cater to contemporary psychological needs of the workers. Such an organizational brand culture recognizes the individual's need to connect and contribute to greater society by, for instance, inducing and facilitating the introduction of social responsibility agendas into organization's function. Furthermore, these values and culture are effective means to imbue workers with work-induced meaning of the greater social reality.

The concept of 'employer brand' is the base for the coining a new kind of work 'contract'. Bunting (2004) defines the new psychological contract as a transaction where the worker commits his/her hearth, mind and soul to the organization in exchange for the organization to provide meaning to his/her work and life. Indeed, Bunting (2004), referring to Ciulla (2000), claims that the organization assumes the functions of religion in providing meaning to all aspects of human life and those of love in soliciting an emotional commitment. She underlines the potential controversial features of such assumptions as they conceal the decline in negotiating power of workers when the organization is prioritized over – and even eradicates – unions, they mask the significance of the increasingly precarious job security and they veil the inequality of pay. We add that since it aims at effecting on, if not constructing, the meaning system of the worker, the new psychological contract has an extensive span of influence covering non-work life contexts such as friendships, families and hobbies.

*Proposition 5: Work organizations promote an organizational identity for their workers so that in exchange for workers' greater commitment and intense work, organizations give meaning to their lives. This new psychological contract is even more exploitive than it seems because it extends to non-work life spheres as well.*

### 3.3. Identity

Late modern societies and contemporary workplaces provide the individuals with a plurality of discourses to reflexively construct their identities in a coherent yet multifaceted narrative. Following Alvesson and Willmott (2002), we hold that the central life interests that may shift over time and place may lead to the adoption or dismissal of competing sets of values. Indeed, the promotion of certain values by the use of a particular vocabulary may define a context and establish the appropriateness of social selves in this context. Thus, individuals attempt at constructing a coherent narrative of their identity through embracing and resisting to certain discourses rooted in work and non-work contexts.

Social identification theory – adapted to organizational studies by Ashforth and Mael (1989: 26-34) – assumes that the concept of self combines idiosyncratic characteristics of a personal identity with group norms and values emerging from a social identity. Social identification theory provides us with three insights relevant to our analysis. To begin with, new recruits to an organization are expected to attribute meaning to themselves and their context through references to their particular subunits as their immediate social environment. Second, they may develop identities with reference to a psychological group – a group to which they do not participate physically. Lastly, ‘self-stereotyping’ occurs when a human being identifies himself/herself with reference to his/her interpretation of group values and norms.

*Proposition 6: Immediate groups, psychological groups and self-stereotypes are influential in the construction of identity.*

*Proposition 7: If the organization’s values and new recruits’ values are aligned, then it is more likely that the new recruits will successfully adapt to the new environment and stay with the company longer.*

Pratt and Foreman (2000) profess an economic discourse of cost-benefit analysis when they study the plurality of identities. They argue that a managerial perspective toward self is an effective way to maximize the benefits and minimize the costs of multiple identities. Moreover,

they suggest that the major objective of such a (self-) management practice is to maintain an ‘optimal number of identities’.

*Proposition 8: In late modern work contexts, disrupted, fragmented and thus multiplied identities are objects of (self-) management practices so that an optimum balance is procured.*

Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) address to the significance of multiple identities and they distinguish between work and non-work identities. Their study alludes that a strong work identity may facilitate emotional labor and contributes to a feeling of personal fulfillment through work activities. Yet, this state of psychological health may be reversed if such a strong social identity is threatened by the loss of status of the relevant group.

Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) conceptualize identity as an ever-being-constructed entity and they suggest a state of “psychological–existential worry and the scepticism or inconsistencies faced in encounters with others or with our images of them (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003: 1165)” to fuel continuously such an identity work. This argument leads us to question what kind of individuals face the most intense pressures of identity regulation attempts and if and how they resist these attempts. Thus, we question the tendency to ‘fit-in’ to organizational definitions of the social reality, mainly in terms of what constitutes ‘work’ and ‘life’. We study the strategies on how to value and prioritize their conflicting demands on individual’s most restricted source: time.

A contribution by Alvesson and Karreman (2007) underlines the concept of ‘identity projects’ as individuals continuously imagine and construct a future self. Work identity is an increasingly significant element of this project of the self. On the other hand, significant non-work life events may provide alternative sets of values to be assessed against work-promoted and -promoting ones.

*Proposition 9: In the absence of traditional nets of identity security such as religion, individuals exhibit post-material existential worries and they are vulnerable to the claims of organizations to provide them meaning and psychological security. Individuals with balanced non-work attachments can resist to attempts at identity regulation.*

### 3.4. Identity Construction in Knowledge-Intensive Firms

Alvesson (2001) suggests that ambiguity-intensive work contexts in knowledge-intensive firms urge knowledge workers to ponder on and account for ‘what they do, and what sort of people they are (Alvesson 2001: 871)’. Indeed, a litmus test for knowledge-intensive sectors of a late modern, late capitalist economy consists of the significance of self- and context-descriptions of the workers on their work. Conscious identity work is thus asserted to be a main concern for knowledge workers.

Alvesson (2004) continues by qualifying this stream of thought when he points at the functionality of a carefully woven work identity in performing knowledge work with co-workers and clients alike. He claims that an ideal or a ‘right’ kind of self serves as a guarantee of professionalism in the absence of substantial criteria to measure work performance or outcome. Besides, an elaborate and highly estimated corporate identity evoked in organizational selves may enhance the evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness by clients as well as workers themselves. Based on these assumptions, managerial policy in a knowledge-intensive organization may reasonably opt for influencing work identities of its employees.

*Proposition 10: Individuals tend to construct appropriate selves in order to fit in the organizational context when they interact with colleagues and clients. The construction of an appropriate self is related to or promoted by organizational discourses.*

*Proposition 11: In relationships with colleagues and clients, the construction of an appropriate self is an attempt to promote the impression of a reliable and professional individual.*

A study of professionalism and client-orientation in knowledge-intensive firms by Anderson-Gough et al. (2000), sheds light upon two modes of identity that legitimize the prioritization of ‘work’ over ‘life’. To begin with, Anderson-Gough et al. indicate some examples of assumed proper professional behavior: “style of clothing, hairstyle, demonstration of efficiency and respect for others through time-management, and tidiness such as clearing

away files and coffee cups (Anderson-Gough et al. 2000: 1156)”. Such a conception of professionalism requires esthetic as well as emotional labor of knowledge workers.

In this context, the discourse of client-orientation serves as a legitimating device to assure the compliance for the above mentioned esthetic and emotional tasks. Anderson-Gough et al. (2000) suggest that the alleged power, demands and claims of client disguise the responsibility of shareholders, partners or senior managers in the organization who are in fact directly involved in regulating the extent and intensity of work activities as well as work identities of the employees. Instead, knowledge workers embrace the supplementary esthetic and emotional tasks as a manifestation of their work identity.

Furthermore, Anderson-Gough et al. (2000) touch upon a major concern for us, namely prioritization and time allocation to ‘work’ and ‘life’ demands. They insightfully argue that the cult of client-orientation promotes the ritual of long work-days (not uncommonly, even work-nights) and legitimizes “a culture of ‘sacrifice’ of personal time (Anderson-Gough et al. 2000: 1160)”.

*Proposition 12: Emotional and esthetic labor not only comprise an increasingly significant part of contemporary work experience of knowledge workers but these kinds of labor are also performed outside the work contexts.*

### **3.5. Clash of Identities and Resistance Practices: Work vs. Life**

The late modernity and contemporary workplace provide knowledge workers with a broader range of choices concerning the performance of their work tasks and the scheduling of their work time. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) suggest that the process of work may be reformed by the prevalence of teamwork practices and the decay of established hierarchies. Even though they recognize that this kind of emancipation does not address to the objects of work activities, they consider that resulting increased discretion at work fosters the ‘micro emancipation’ of knowledge workers. Moreover, as Alvesson and Willmott observe, the

promotion of micro-emancipation undermines collective and organized forms of resistance, e.g. through labor unions, that aim for more extensive and intensive forms of emancipation.

We claim that the discourse of micro-emancipation and the promotion of self-regulatory work activities divert analytical interest from more embedded forms of exploitation. We study the micro-emancipatory elements from a critical perspective in order to gain an insight upon what they legitimize.

*Proposition 13: More flexibly and less hierarchically organized workplaces claim to increase the discretion of workers over their work time. Yet, as they attempt at regulating their choices about how to use this discretionary power, the impression of micro-emancipation thus risks disguising a more intensive form of exploitation and alienation.*

Thomas and Davies (2005) assert that the various discourses of stakeholders offer subject positions for an individual. Resistance emerges from the distance between alternative subject positions thus proposed and the individual interests. They define resistance as “a constant process of adaptation, subversion and reinscription of dominant discourses (Thomas and Davies 2005: 687)” when human beings continuously re-construct their identities.

Thus, we acknowledge that a form of micro-resistance may indeed emerge from the re-interpretation of (dominant) discourses. Still, at least in our context, we deem that some forms of micro-resistance may mask the problematic infrastructures of the arena where resistance and emancipation takes place – in our case, knowledge intensive work contexts.

*Proposition 14: Resistance to dominant discourses may take the form of re-interpreting these discourses or constructing alternative discourses. The complacency with the principles underlining the dominant discourses – however re-interpreted – strengthens these discourses and suffocates the significance of alternative accounts that can promote more revolutionary resistance practices.*

### **3.6. Conclusion**

In the late modern postmaterial societies, a whole and unitary social meaning is disrupted and fragmented. The meaning network connecting the different life spheres to each other thus shattered, unitary traditional identity narratives of the individuals have become redundant as well. Instead, amorphous and ephemeral discourses compete for taking part in the construction of individual identity narratives. Having lost its place as a part of the unitary whole, work is also a discourse-production context and work organization an actor in the construction of identity.

In their immediate and mediated contexts, individuals construct and manage appropriate identities by adopting or resisting to this multiplicity of discourses. Work being a significant life sphere, the kinds of labor an individual performs contribute to the construction of his/her identity. Especially, emotional and esthetic labors cross the boundaries of work and pour out to other life spheres. Consequently, work-rooted discourses may influence the construction of non-work identities. The export of work-rooted identities to other spheres of life and vice versa brings about the normalization of underlying discourses. Moreover, blurring boundaries risk expanding the scale of work to the disadvantage other life spheres.

The work-related outcomes of these interactions include the construction of a professional identity that not only gives meaning to emotional and esthetic labor but also effect the motivation and retainment of the employees. However, effects on non-work contexts are open to further reflexion.

## **CHAPTER 4: Case Description**

When we describe our case, we start by a general description of global and national contexts as we believe that these extensive contexts are influential not only in terms of providing a socio-economical background but also because of the fact that they embed discursive elements translated to specific contexts. We continue with outlining sectoral and organizational contexts as we draw attention to their particular contributions to our study. As a last point, we add the professional context of the majority of our sample. We believe that the interaction of these contexts shape the discourses and relations in our particular case.

### **4.1. Global Context**

In the wake of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, postmaterial societies are acclaimed for loosing their organic bonds weaved through the interaction of familial, religious and ethno-national nets. In addition, global wealth accumulated at increasing rates is more evenly distributed in postmaterial (welfare of post-welfare) societies. Demographical changes contribute to the stagnation, if not decline, of postmaterial populations. Consequently, in late modernity, class is claimed to lose its significance as a social status marker as education and white collar careers become less discriminatorily available across the classical variables of gender, age and family background.

The late modernity discourse thus holds an individualist ideal. Individuals ‘liberated’ from their traditional bonds are not only forced to be free (cf. Rousseau) but also responsible for their stance in life as well as for ‘becoming themselves’ through efforts of self-constructing and self-managing. Thus, this discourse implies that to have control over one’s own life is – at least, to a certain extent – possible and certainly desirable.

### **4.2. National Context: Sweden**

Sweden is a Scandinavian welfare state and a postmaterial society. We observe that Swedishness is evoked as a cherished part of work culture and identity of employees. Indeed, Swedish culture is considered at an almost equal footing as organizational culture in defining work-life balance.

“I think it [the work-life balance]’s a Swedish thing – because we Swedish [people] don’t like to work all the time [laughing].” [Orange]

“Work-life balance is a mixture of Rainbow and Swedish culture. I think definitely that it’s more of a Rainbow thing.” [Blue]

The praise of Swedish people narrows down to the attribution of similar and complementary values, priorities and choices to the Swedish youth. In fact, the new generations are suggested as the reason for these less-work practices and non-work allegiances.

“Today’s youth, they don’t want to work too much. It’s important to have thing to do but work.” [Blue]

“Most are people a little bit older than me. I think they think differently, they’re more career-oriented. I feel that people at my age are not that much [career-oriented]. So we’re changing that a little bit, we are trying to go home when we are done. But people around 30-35, especially men, they work harder. They only see the career; it’s the only thing that matters.” [Red]

Sweden has also a long tradition of gender equality, especially in regard of familial issues. Feminism has granted the working mothers the legitimacy of having normal work hours for the sake of their children. Moreover, a kind of masculinism has extended this right of parenthood to fathers as well. In other words, in Swedish context, parenthood is a legitimate reason for women and men alike to balance their work hours in favor of their families.

To sum up, on the one hand, self-stereotyping as Swedish alleviates the pressures of overwork and provides the employees of a global company with a common ground to resist over-exploitation. “I think I can have a career even if I work normal hours.” says Orange. In this case, the values of a postmaterial society legitimize the demands of employees to favorably balance

their lives. On the other hand, this discourse of Swedish people having non-work priorities and a culture ‘not to work much’ seriously veils the global socio-economical and political dynamics that render them possible.

#### **4.3. Sectoral Context: Auditing and Tax Consultancy**

Auditing is a dynamic knowledge-intensive work context. In addition, accuracy and reliability of auditing work is not only professionally but also legally of utmost importance. The classical motives for working in a top company comprise economic and social elements. The payments are above the sector average. The social status of working at a Big Four company is also very compensatory since the work validates the employee’s claims for intelligence and success – to be recruited corresponds to be selected as one of ‘the best and the most brilliant’.

In knowledge-intensive contexts, the career prospective in companies with high turnover are claimed to be challenging and stressful to the employees who compete with each other to go up in the organizational pyramid. However, the auditing services are much wanted across industries and audits are scarce resources as professionals. Therefore, the emphasis is not on promoting the most successful employees, getting rid of the least successful ones and introducing new blood to the organization to restart the selection process. Instead, organizations try to retain their employees while the successful audit professionals are lured by client firms with higher pay and less workload. Under such circumstances where the possible competition for upper places in career ladder is eliminated through the interference of client firms, our interviewees confirm that the auditing firms are seen as providing even more career opportunities for the ones who stay in the organization.

This sectoral context renders audits relatively powerful actors with a broad range of inter-sectoral options. It can also decrease the workload pressure upon the employees due to the presence of other work opportunities. For instance, “I think I can have a career even if I work normal hours.” states Orange. In this competitive market for audits, auditing firms resort to other

mechanisms to ensure loyalty to their organizations and to balance the attractions of higher pay and lower work hours. As Blue explains:

“Some see [this work] as a training program – salaries are not the best in the business. But for me, you have to look at the whole picture: the colleagues, the name of the firm and the career possibilities. If you put it all together, I’m really happy with my situation right now.”

The knowledge-intensive features of a top auditing firm address to professional and personal demands of the employees. These elements consist not only of a variety of interesting and challenging tasks performed in a continuous learning environment but also of autonomous and flexible work and a non-hierarchical organization. All of our interviewees admit that they appreciate to work in a learning organization. For instance, “It’s really a learning environment all the time and you can never be fully-learned. Here it is law, you have to learn because law says so.”, says Blue.

Still, we observe that even though autonomy emerging from the replacement of supervisory regulations by the teamwork practices is generally appraised, it has significant downsides as well. We note that on-the-job learning where employees learn from each other and their team leader is the main form of learning in the organization we study. The literature predominantly appraises this kind of face-to-face interaction as it enables to share tacit and explicit knowledge alike (cf. Nonaka 1994; Newell et al. 2002). However, our interviewees voice frustration and serious concerns about the costs of overreliance on the unstructured learning environments.

“I think I expected to learn more theoretically, not just ad hoc. I don’t really have time to study the things that I do. I expected classes or somebody following me, teaching me. Even if, of course, you learn a lot by doing it but still... I think they waste time [saying us] “OK, suit yourself.” It would be better if they had a plan for new people – because they don’t [laughing]. I think maybe their plan is just to put you there, and of course it’s a person you develop, but still, I think they should care a little bit more about the education. It is important that you have a certain education within this work.” [Red]

As to the peculiarities of this sector, we deem that the yearly pattern of workload distribution is worth mentioning. Our interviewees report that in high season, approximately from December to March, they regularly overwork up to 10-11 hours a day. The workday may even extend up to 13-14 hours. In low season that mainly corresponds to spring and summer, they have mostly shorter workdays where they can ‘spend’ the work hours they ‘earned’ in high season in the form of early leaves from work.

#### **4.4. Organizational Context**

A global network of professional services firm operated in 145 countries and employing over 120.000 people, Rainbow is one of the big four auditing firms. Rainbow provides audit services, tax services and advisory services. We are studying a Swedish branch of this organization.

Our auditor interviewees report that their aspiration was to work at a Big Four company and that they applied to a number of them. These firms are highly visible for students, especially in university career days, and some of our interviewees knew Rainbow before applying and joining the company. Yet, even though their application to these companies is reasonable in the light of the above-mentioned sector-specific incentives, we deem that their eventual recruitment is not the pure logical result of objective criteria. Indeed, we come across two such elements that contribute to recruitment of new employees, namely ‘luck’ and ‘timing’.

The element of luck consists of the elusive fit between organization’s momentary balance of the employee profile and the profile of the applicants. This factor of fit may seem self-evident, yet we do not refer to knowledge, capabilities or skills. Instead, we take seriously the joke of one of our interviewees and we reflect on how the anti-discrimination measures that aim to have a balanced employee profile can – expressively or tacitly – influence recruitment decisions.

“They search for different profiles. And if you have like 10 girls working and 1 guy, they are after a guy so that they can have a balance [joking]. You have to be lucky and they have to be looking for you.” [Blue]

Another detail that strikes us is how the speed of organizational response to applicants determines their choices about to company with which they are to work. Indeed, the majority of our interviewees have applied to other Big Four companies as well and their final decision is thus based on a kind of ‘first come, first served’ logic. Moreover, one interviewee has applied to Rainbow after her graduation, yet, in this case Rainbow was ‘late’ and she started to work at another firm – only to accept their offer in a couple of years.

Rainbow supports the discourse of diversity in the workplace and we agree that our interviewees are from a variety of backgrounds and have different pre-Rainbow experiences. Our interviewees univocally express some ‘required traits’ even though a general diversity of personalities is also encouraged. These essential personality traits include open-mindedness, team-spirit, approachableness and friendliness. Employees are supposed to be responsible for their tasks but they are also expected to share responsibility in teamwork contexts. Still, the most prominent characteristics of colleagues are their being “good” and “nice”, and thus the work is “cool”.

Indeed, in addition to the predominant references to these personality traits, one of our interviewees point at the priority of personality over knowledge as a recruitment criterion:

“When you come from school you have your head filled with theories and you know everything about everything but in practice, you actually about to start working, you don’t know that much. You really don’t know anything! Because it’s a different world. So knowledge is OK, you have the package with you, you have four and a half years of university studies and it’s good to have all that. But you don’t have any practical experience; at least I didn’t have any practical experience. So I think the most important thing for Rainbow is that the personality fits. They want to see that you’re able to sponge in the knowledge and then they [teach] you from the beginning the way they want you to be – it is like raising a child: they want you to learn from the beginning Rainbow way and everything. So the knowledge is important, but not as important as the personality, I think.”

#### **4.5. Professional Context**

We have expected that young professionals who have recently joined a top consulting company would have career as a priority in life. We were convinced that the choice of a Big Four company would be a significant manifestation of the importance of work and career-related objectives. However, the explicit responses of our employees were remarkably devoid of such references to professional success. They univocally claim that in addition to family, friends and relationships, they value self-care and personal development. Yet, throughout the interview where our questions did not directly refer to the priorities, we find traces of at least a temporary prioritization of career objectives and professional success.

Most of all interviewees affirm that learning is very important for them. Furthermore, most of our interviewees are revisors, who are required to pass an auditing exam (Uniform Certified Public Accountant Examination – Uniform CPA Exam) to become auditors. They suggest that auditing exams are conceived as more of a “personal thing” that one can barely have time to study for. The devaluation of academic knowledge and the neglect of theoretical preparation for the exams is the à la Alvessonian manifestation of Rainbow attempts to prioritize organization over profession.

However, none of them enumerate professional success as an important objective of their lives. For instance, one of our interviewees is a regular yet amateur sportsman who claims that his practice has invaluable contributions for his work and who counts it among the important things in his life. Yet, he expresses that he does not bother much when he has to almost continuously overwork in 3-4 months in a year and practically neglect sports completely in this period. “I think that the job is the most important thing for me right now.” he states.

Thus, we argue that the discourse of ‘late modern Swedish young professionals’ prioritize non-work allegiances such as family and social activities as the most important aspects of their lives. Although they fail to expressively admit it, in fact it seems that they consider career and professional success among their top priorities – at least in this period of their lives. We conclude that it is not so much the importance of work in an individual’s life as its claimed importance that has changed across generations. In other words, even though the priorities may not have shifted so much, to express the professional aspirations as priorities is no more ‘fashionable’.

## CHAPTER 5: Case Analysis

Studying our empirical material in the light of our theoretical material, we analyze colleagues' interaction with other colleagues and clients while they perform emotional and esthetic labor. We then reflect upon the reactions of the individuals in terms of their adaptation and commitment to the organization. Our final remarks are about a multifaceted discourse that binds multiple identities to each other.

### 5.1. Interactions with Colleagues and Clients and the Performance of Emotional Labor

Our interviewees have described their colleagues not as mere acquaintances at work, but they address them as close friends – or even as a second family.

“Right now, I feel like it’s my second family – people that you like to share things with, when you have a rough time at home or whatever. Indeed, you can tell it and they would understand.” [Blue]

They assert that their friends at work are a motive to enjoy working at Rainbow and a reason for working late together. For instance, Yellow says “I enjoy going to work because I can feel that my friends are here also.” Blue agrees with her: “Nobody can tell you to stay here and work. It’s a thing that you can do yourself ‘I really want to be here for my team. If they are staying, I’m staying as well.’ So it’s the team spirit that makes you stay to help out your mates.” An environment of friendship alleviates the work pressures and smoothens the performance of work. “If you know someone personally, it is more likely that you go to people and ask questions. You learn faster if you have social bonding.” adds Green.

In addition to being the arena where the dominant family discourse binds employees together, Rainbow actively supports out-of-work socialization of employees through a special budget for social activities.

“We’re making a lot of social events here. We are the latest 8 people who started to work at this firm and we are called the activity group. We are in charge of all activities here. We have after works, we have a lot of parties, and this Tuesday, we were playing curling.” [Violet]

In our study, we thus observe that the organization attempts at giving meaning to the lives of the employees by offering them a second family and by actively supporting their socialization through functional and economic means alike. Predominant teamwork practices increase the interdependence of employees. The funding of social activities binds them to each other more strictly. Need is thus created to forge a community and incentive is provided to promote a feeling of community.

On this point, we allude the psychological contract of Bunting (2004). Rainbow provides a second family to its employees in exchange for their greater commitment to the workplace, and their allocation of time to work more readily whenever necessary. Our interviewees report that in the Peak Period they may work up to 10-11 hours – close to deadlines, up to 13-14 hours. Yet, Blue reasons, “You have the colleagues who are in the same situation as you are.”

As to their relations to their superiors, our interviewees express that the relations between team members and team leaders are open, friendly and informal. Blue says that:

“The boss came to me the first day; she sat down and talked to me just like a friend. She asked me questions like ‘How is your family doing?’ or ‘How is it with the soccer?’, ‘Oh, my son he plays soccer as well...’”

In consideration of mentoring and guiding roles of the superiors qua team leaders, we observe two different approaches in two divisions represented in our sample. The majority of our interviewees are from auditing division. Still, our tax consultant interviewee provides us with valuable counter points to compare and contrast with the experiences of audits.

We note that the major critique concerning the unmet expectations from superiors is related to their mentoring function as personal trainers and career planners. Indeed, we think that the individuals, who have previous work experience, especially in institutionalized organizations, can compare this experience with their present situation. In this instance, we notice that under-

planning and under-organizing may be very frustrating, particularly for the newly employed young professionals. Red states that:

“[The worst part of working at Rainbow] is the lack of personal education right here and now to follow up with what we do all the time – like a feedback. Comparing with [an international home products retailer], I worked there on the shop-floor, but they really had a plan – a paper of 10 pages [about] exactly what I was supposed to know and [I] go through with them, together, and [I] learn. Comparing what you have to know here and [the international home products retailer], it feels like ‘OK, but you miss the big part!’ To have some plan and maybe a mentor who goes through it. It feels an unsure situation all the time. It’s not that fun to work if you’re not certain of what you do. We’re supposed to do a lot of different things but some kind of plan would be nice.”

The employees in the law division of Rainbow who work as tax consultants face similar challenges as their tasks require the continuous update of their knowledge according to amendments of laws and their consultancy is thus very important to provide the legal basis of auditing tasks. Our interviewee from this division informs us about a different approach to supervisory and mentoring role of her superior:

“For my personal development, it [the best part of working at Rainbow] is that I have a guide when it comes to my work, that I can trust somebody and that he has to check the things that I have done. That is important to me. I want everything to be correct when I do something for the client. And I want to develop myself.” [Yellow]

We argue that the excess of autonomy and discretion may incite feelings of stress and frustration for the employee not only because they are expected to perform more smart, reflected and emotion-intensive labor, but also the responsibilities they are burdened with may exceed their experience. In the light of the empirical findings above, we hold that adhocracies should not be unqualifiedly appraised as enabling and emancipatory work contexts for promoting autonomy and discretion of the employees.

Even though the unmet expectations frustrate the employees, the general work environment is appreciated. Considering the organizational context, emotional commitment

towards teammates suppresses the negative feelings in case of overwork. Indeed, being a community and having quasi-organic relations leads an employee away from cost-benefit analyses towards more altruistic relationships. We hold that the promotion of such a relationship logic makes an employee to submit more readily to work demands over his/her time. Therefore, we claim that the act of expressing friendship or even familial feelings towards colleagues is an intense form of emotional labor.

The performance of this kind of labor thus contributes to the productivity and efficiency of the organization and it is seen as a professional behavior in colleague-to-colleague contexts. To quote Green:

“I thought it was going to be very mainstream, very professional... Of course they are professional, but they are also colleagues. They are very professional obviously, but we don't keep distance to each other, that's what I mean.”

Indeed, the ‘professional colleague’ is nice, open, friendly, helpful, cooperative and sharing. We observe that the context of colleague-to-colleague interaction provides us with a colleague-based (in comparison to a client-based) description of professionalism, one which emphasizes soft values of friendship and help. As Blue confirms, such a professionalism enlivens teamwork practices and knowledge sharing:

“If you're in a group of three or four people, you have to be able to cooperate with each other. If you can't cooperate and each one of these [people] has enormous knowledge keeping it inside, if you're not able to put it off and show it to the others and cooperate with them, then the knowledge is worthless for me. If you have that kind of personality than you can spread your knowledge to your colleagues and help them if they're in need, then I think you have something. Then you have four people with this big package of knowledge and they're able to put it off as well. That's really important for me.”

Rainbow employees spend almost as much time with their clients as with their colleagues. Young professionals who have recently joined to the organization are shortly introduced to client contexts. The client-related personality traits and social skills are among the most important requirements for being employed at Rainbow. Besides, the employees report that

they develop further these skills in interaction with clients. The personality traits include the qualities of being open, friendly and reachable. The social skills comprise the ability to communicate comfortably with the client and to establish a trustworthy relation. We want to illustrate this point with a specific skill, namely the skill to ask questions, as our interviewees deem it an important part of their job. We argue that, in this client context, the knowledge worker constructs a self-identity towards his/her client in order to appear professional – competent and reliable.

“That’s a big thing when it comes to the chief executive of a big company and you’re new. You’re the interviewer and you are interviewing him or her in that situation and asking questions about how they are running their firm. It’s really not that easy because you’re new and you don’t know anything but you’re sitting there. I think the main theme there is to be able to perform and to show them that you’re a serious person and to know how to ask the questions. Because if you put the questions in the wrong way, they’ll see that you’re not the person to ask these questions, that you really don’t have this knowledge. But if you put it in the right way, they can open up to you and start talking about the things and you can get information that you like. I think that’s a big skill that you have to develop all the time.” [Blue]

A main task of seniors is to help junior employees in their client relations. Orange tells “We work in teams, the team leader guides me about what to say, what questions to ask – so I get help from there.”

While emotional labor exercised in interaction with colleagues has a function of enhancing commitment and community feelings, the efforts for checking and suppressing emotions in client relations corresponds to an opposite function of this kind of labor:

“Often we’re working at the client’s firm 2-3 days a week depending on how big is the client. If you work with a very big client, you can be there for 2-3 weeks, sitting with them. Then you really get to know these people. Then they become your colleagues. It’s a difficult balance sometimes. You can’t get too friendly with them because we have this kind of work that we’re controllers and we work with audit, we want to check their books and see if everything is OK. So we’re trying to avoid this relationship when we talk to

our client, to avoid [conversations like]: ‘Oh, I forgot to pay these taxes, maybe you can pass this time and I’ll pay next year.’ There you have to be like: ‘You gotta do it this way, this year, right now. We’re friends but you have to follow the law.’ That’s the most important thing.” [Blue]

As Blue clearly expressed above, emotional labor in the client relations consists of keeping oneself in a certain range of emotions: friendly, but not too friendly; trustful, but not fully so. Employees thus purposefully harness themselves in order not to have genuine feelings. They do not socialize with the clients. Their professional identity is in part related to their keeping this delicate balance.

### **5.1.1. An Accessory to Emotional Labor: Esthetic Labor**

In addition to emotional labor, professional employees perform esthetic labor (cf. Anderson-Gough et al. 2000: 1156) in client contexts due to the adherence to formal dress codes in interaction with clients. In contrast, we note the praise of informality of style and talk in regular office work in interaction with fellow colleagues and superiors. Violet says:

“You can come to work in jeans, if you are not meeting any clients. It’s not very [strict and formal]. I expected it to be more [strict and formal]. It’s smooth.”

Thus, in our case, the practice of professionalism towards colleagues has different norms than towards clients in terms of esthetic labor. On the one hand, the loosening expectations from employees in terms of performing esthetic labor may enhance the feeling of freedom and equality in the workplace. On the other hand, it increases the vulnerability of symbolic boundaries between work and non-work life spheres. We believe that a traditionally formal style of clothing functions as a symbolic on-off mechanism/device to differentiate work contexts from other life contexts. Consequently, the demise of such a mechanism promotes the mix of life spheres that have previously kept more or less apart.

As dress codes separating work and non-work life spheres become obsolete, the weakened symbolic boundaries get more susceptible to the effects of emotional labor. Indeed, the references a ‘second family’ in workplace and its export to non-work social contexts blur the symbolic boundaries further. This blurred boundary is also claimed to be a manifestation of professionalism in colleague-to-colleague interaction.

Alluding to the discussion of normalization by Alvesson (2001), we call this process of balancing work and life ‘over-normalization of work through re-interpretation of professional identities’ – the norms and the normal being life itself. However, we hold a critical perspective towards a possibly problematic outcome: Such normalization with reference to a commonsensical conception of life may serve to conceal the dialectics underlying the adopted concepts or the resistance practices challenging dominant forms of conception. In other words, the import of informal dressing into work contexts disregards the sociology of clothing styles in relation to lifestyles. Then, further research is needed to account for subtleties of appropriate informal dress codes. A similar critique is a valid one towards the discourse of second family. The adoption and appraisal of such a discourse disregards abusive and dysfunctional families and it promotes an idyllic image of family.

## **5.2. Reactions**

### **5.2.1. A Catalyzer for Adaptation and Commitment to Organization**

The general expectations about a new context depend on the previous knowledge and experiences of an individual about similar contexts. As we do not have individuals in our sample with previous work experience in a similar knowledge-intensive firm (KIF), we classify our interviewees into two groups: the ones who have no work experience and the ones who had non-KIF work experience.

Our most satisfied and committed interviewee has no previous work experience and he is employed by Rainbow 7-8 months before his graduation. For instance, he has no scruples in

stating that work-life balance is a characteristic of Rainbow even though he has not worked in other organizations. He also uses the most strongly favorable terms for social life within Rainbow referring to a ‘second family’.

On the other hand, our least happy and most critical interviewee has previous work experience in other organizations with strong culture. She acknowledges the benefits of an informal and flexible work environment, yet, she is also aware of the downsides of such arrangements. She particularly refers to the resulting lack of planning and the lack of time for non-work relationships and activities.

Direct campus recruitment and previous work experience in an institutionalized organization are two poles of the experience axis in our case. The individuals who have no previous work experience seem to be more prone to have an uncritical and positive view of Rainbow whereas individuals who had such experiences are more likely to voice critiques. We do not argue that previous work experience automatically translates into the critique of the present organization. Still, we do claim that such experiences provide the individual with a leverage of comparison so that they can reflect on the organization culture and values more consciously and insightfully. Early socialization into Rainbow helps to construct more committed selves that tend to be excessively uncritical towards their organization.

### **5.2.2. An inhibitor that Obstructs Adaptation**

Work in teams of nice, open and helpful friends is fulfilling and emotionally rewarding. The absence of strict supervision and hierarchy evokes feelings of empowerment and freedom in workplace. The flexible feature of labor enhances the discretion of employees over their work time. The lack of routines and the performance of different and challenging tasks enrich the learning experience. In this sense, we agree that in the micro context of work, knowledge workers are emancipated from over-specialized work tasks and regulatory pressures of hierarchical supervision (cf. Alvesson and Willmott 2002).

Our empirical material comprises young professionals who have recently joined Rainbow and most of our interviewees do not have previous experience in adhocracies. They voice their concerns about the lack of supervisory support as they demand for more planning and structure in their work. Moreover, since they are relatively inexperienced, they complain about the need to ask their colleagues about every new task they perform. They demand organized theoretical training to accompany the predominantly on-the-job training. A dominant discourse in knowledge-intensive contexts condemns supervisory roles as frustrating the employees and hindering their creativity (cf. Newell et al. 2002; Alvesson 2004). This discourse also appraises teamwork in flat and flexible organizations for the sake of greater responsibility for and ownership of the employee's work. Yet, our study – at least – partially contradicts the premises of this discourse.

Overdependence on collectivist teamwork practices not only may hinder individual efforts to learn more systematically but also it may leave blind spots in collective knowledge that might possibly be grounds for creative and innovative approaches. In addition, we are especially concerned about the threats to employees' self-esteem since the lack of theoretical training restricts the learning possibilities to continuous and direct interactions with team members and team leaders. Indeed, our empirical material supports us with experiences of frustration in the face of such acclaimed emancipatory practices as increased autonomy and discretion in the workplace. Violet states that:

“It's not fun all the time to go ask people for help. Everyone here has been in the same position, in the same situation and they know that you can't do your work if you don't ask for help. If you need help, they'll help you. [But], of course, it's not very fun to always ask for help. I am the kind of person that wants to do it on her own. But you have to admit that you need help.”

As a further implication, the praise of autonomy disregards the fact that the most elaborated yet painstaking control consists of the practices of self-control and self-discipline (cf. Elias 1939). Likewise, increased discretion over work legitimizes the underlying concepts and notions that construct 'work'. Thus, we hold that a critique of the discourse of micro-

emancipation is possible through the re-interpretation of the discourses of autonomy and discretion.

### **5.2.3. Multifaceted Family Discourse: Towards A Unified Identity**

Throughout our analysis, we come across references to family discourse in three contexts. We argue that, according to their shifting priorities in life, individuals balance the three meanings of family and they construct their identity contextually.

Our first point concerns the construction of colleagues (including both junior and senior employees, or team members and team leaders) and thus workplace as the second family. This discourse of 'work-as-family' strengthens the emotional bonds and commitment to the work organization. It fosters the legitimacy of overwork. Besides, it also functions as a catalyzer to ease and increase knowledge sharing. In our sample of young professionals, this meaning of work seems to be the most prominent one.

Secondly, the ascendancy of genuine family with pregnancy and childbirth undermines the centrality of work-as-family. The introduction of new responsibilities prioritizes the demands of non-work life spheres over work. The hegemony of work-as-family is thus challenged with the re-emergence of the genuine family. When the account of employees with families is coupled with the self-projections as parents, our interviewees affirm that as the demands over an individual's time increase in this manner, the commitment to the workplace would decrease. We observe that, in our context, these new demands are met with tolerance and understanding. Pregnancy and childcare duties are acknowledged as sources of legitimate claims for working less than fellow colleagues. In other words, even in the periods when the over-work is the rule, the employees with childcare responsibilities are the exception. We suggest that the cross-references to family in both work and non-work establish family even more securely as a legitimate discourse.

In the first two references to family, we observe family as an idealized concept that legitimizes the work and non-work demands on individuals' time. Here, we are critical of these

unqualified references because of the fact that their idealization not only disregards familial abuses in theory but also causes practical abuses in work. In addition to emotional labor, we argue that family as a legitimate discourse for parents' demands discriminates against non-parents. For instance, while parents can leave work on time even in high season due to their childcare responsibilities, the self-centered demands of non-parents are not considered as legitimate reasons not to perform overtime work.

The interplay of the three faces of the family discourse is a major tool for the employees to check work and non-work demands against each other in the continuous construction of their identities. A reason for the higher degrees of commitment is the successful internalization of work-as-family discourse. However, legitimacy of this discourse allows parent-employees to balance their non-work commitments more favorably than their non-parent colleagues. We argue that the family discourse is a major component of the emotional labor performed in Rainbow.

We note that the all-encompassing family discourse is the dominant organizational discourse, at least according to our empirical material. Apart from slight references to Swedishness and youth, the majority of our observations connect to this overwhelming multifaceted discourse. We suggest that intersecting references to family discourse from work and non-work spheres of life weave for employees the material for a quasi-unitary identity.

## **CHAPTER 6: Discussion and Conclusions**

In this last chapter of our study, we summarize our main line of argument and we clarify our contributions. Our first theme relates to the positive as well as possibly controversial outcomes of emotional labor. Second, we provide an account of identity construction through discourses related to the performance of emotional labor. Our final remarks point at a new form of alienation rooted in the construction of identities with the influence of discourses unifying work and non-work life spheres. We conclude the chapter and thus this study by restating our main findings, contributions and arguments.

### **6.1. Motivation or Emotional Exploitation**

Rainbow, a knowledge-intensive organization, encourages informality towards colleagues and superiors in the workplace and even introduces measures that materially contribute to the socialization of the employees with each other. Teamwork is thus facilitated by the friendly, open and helpful interaction of the employees. Moreover, morale and motivation of the workforce is increased. The employees refer to their workplace in most cordial terms and even present their colleagues and superiors as a second family.

We hold that emotional commitment of the employees increases the probability of their ungrudging participation to overwork schedules in teams. In return, organization provides them with a second family – a quasi-traditional network of deep friendship bonds rooted in workplace. Thus, the workplace becomes a more meaningful and meaning-producing locality where employees care about each other and construct a collectivity. Indeed, this interaction corresponds to the concept of psychological contact by Bunting (2004) who explains emotional involvement in work context in terms of exchange between employee commitment and work-originated meaning.

On the other hand, the promotion of emotional bonds in the workplace in fact burdens the employee with a new kind of labor – emotional labor – and consequently, his/her emotions

become a means of production. We argue that emotional labor of the employee is not recognized as an important part of his/her work and they are not remunerated and compensated accordingly. We illustrate our point with a concrete example. In the context of an organization such as Rainbow, when an employee quits his/her job (voluntarily or not) he/she also loses a great part of his/her social life and friends. However, even though he/she suffers from his/her previous social and emotional commitment to the organization, he/she is not compensated for the post-leave emotional loss.

## **6.2. Clash of Multiple Identities or Merge into Alloyed Identities**

Rainbow is populated by the discourses of a range of immediate and mediated groups that are influential in the construction of identity. Teams of accounting and law divisions are immediate groups. Revisor-auditors as professionals and, to the extent that projections of future selves are counted as time-independent groups, parents constitute a psychological group. Self-stereotyping as 'young Swedes' is another factor in constructing identity (Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

Even though we note the existence of identities such as being Swedish, young, professional (audit or law), (prospective) parent, we observe that rather than being fragmented and multiplied, these identities are compatible and converging. Pratt and Foreman (2000) consider (self-) management practices as essential to secure an efficient balance of a range of identities. However, in our case, a convergence rather than a balance characterize the (self-) managerial efforts on identities.

Indeed, we argue that the discourse of family encompasses both work and non-work life spheres. The collegial definition of professionalism legitimizes the identity of work-family member. Family as the locus of legitimate non-work demands over an individual's time is recognized by stereotypical young Swedish as well. Overall, the discourse of family sanctions both work and non-work collectivist identities. Therefore, we claim that identities merge under the all-encompassing discourse of family.

In this study, we focus on a work-based form of identity narrative. In the first place, the family narrative is imported into work contexts. Subsequently, this ‘second family’ invades the sphere of the genuine family and friendships. Therefore, we argue that late modern knowledge-intensive work contexts are fertile grounds to cultivate quasi-unitary identities under the family discourse. Drawing upon Kuhn (2006), we have proposed that the decline of traditional unitary identity narratives entices individuals to construct their identities with references to identity narratives promoted by different life spheres. Still, our case substantiates the claim that new forms of unitary identity narratives emerge to re-alloy the fragmented identities. Bunting (2004: 268) argues that the contemporary work organizations “speak the language of a religious institution and the language of love.” We add that our organization speaks the unifying language of family.

### **6.3. Reconciliation with Work or Alienation from Non-Work Life**

In contemporary contexts, as modernity shatters the traditional meaning systems, work loses its meaning. The failure of traditional meaning systems strip work of its meaning embedded in these systems. However, we claim that, work in late modernity creates its own meaning system and embeds other aspects of life within its system. On the one hand, we admit that a meaningful workplace promotes micro-emancipation by alleviating the existential worries of the individuals and the work pressures. On the other hand, our findings support our proposition that emotional labor that makes workplaces more meaningful also causes an unnoticed form of alienation. One of our interviewees states that:

“It [Socializing with colleagues] feels good right now, it’s fun and it’s nice to go work. But at the same time it takes time from other friends and family. In the long run I don’t think it’s good to put that much time with the work people. You forget you have another life outside.”

We argue that the cultivation of close friendships and a discourse of work-family cause the individual to be almost totally imbued in the work context. The critiques of modern industrial capitalist societies point at the alienation of workers due to the over-fragmentation of work tasks and over-specialization of workers. This form of classical alienation results from the fact that the worker loses the meaning of his/her work and of his/her contribution to the final product. We claim that in post-industrial societies of late modernity, especially in knowledge-intensive service sectors that we study, the intense mix of for-profit and non-profit motives and allegiances in work contexts leads to the over-amalgamation of identities. We argue that such over-amalgamated identities contribute to an unbalanced allocation of time to work-related activities and relationships. Therefore, the genuine bonds towards a real family and friends outside work contexts are challenged. We name this prioritization of the work-family over non-work family and friends a form of ‘alienation from non-work life’.

A first example to the fact that emotional exploitation leads the way to alienation from non-work life is mentioned above when we refer to the probable outcomes of emotional exploitation. The praise of Rainbow by one of our interviewees provides us with a second example. Our interviewee describes the attractiveness of the organization by referring to retired people coming back to office and spending time there doing paperwork. Rather than drawing an attractive picture of Rainbow, we deem that, in fact, this image conveys a manifestation of unhealthy attachment to workplace. We think that the reason for ‘the return of the retired’ is their over-socialization in their work context. Not only working with but also socializing with and befriending their colleagues during most of their lifetime, the most prominent social circle of new-retired individuals consist of these former colleagues. However, as long as the colleagues continue to work, they keep socializing with new recruits. Retired individuals are gradually replaced by the new members of the work-family. As one of our interviewees foretells: “You don’t know it by the day but when you look back you realize that you didn’t have much time for anything. Time is just thrown by.”

#### **6.4. Work or Quit**

Consideration of the above cited points result in one choice: continue to work or leave Rainbow. We observe that the individuals who internalize the values of the organization more completely and who praise the family discourse more vociferously state their intention to continue working at Rainbow. Conversely, one of our interviewees says that she does not consider anymore staying in the company for the long-term: “I was [considering staying in the long term] in the beginning, because I think the company was my thing. But, not anymore because the [work-life] balance is not working.” Thus, if not a causation, we at least notice a correlation between the adoption of work-as-family discourse and intention to stay at Rainbow in the long term.

We acknowledge that there are a variety of incentives for staying in or leaving a firm, including economic aspects and career opportunities. Yet, as the focus is narrowed down to the outcomes of emotional labor, we observe that adoption of or resistance to dominant values and discourses have significant effects on retention or leave.

## **6.5. Conclusion**

In this study, we weave together two threads of analysis. Our main thread connects late modern work contexts to the identity construction of young professionals through the concepts of emotional labor and psychological contract. Throughout our analysis, we keep returning to this thread in a method that we call ‘converging’. Our second thread consists of introducing relevant analytical contributions to our main theme through the striking points surfacing from our case – including a qualification of professionalism and an account of micro-emancipation in knowledge-intensive contexts. We call this enrichment of analysis by relevant side-accounts a ‘diverging’ method. Our remarks about the divergent points embed their partial conclusions – if they are not unalienable from our main theme so that they are re-analyzed within it. As to our main theme, this last chapter is about a summary and outcomes of the elements covered along the main thread. We conclude our study with a re-evaluation of our main themes and a contribution of insights derived from our empirical material.

Considering emotional labor performed in knowledge-intensive workplaces, we introduce the concept of ‘emotional exploitation’ in order to account for the use of emotions as a means of production not only in client interaction but also, and most significantly, in relations with colleagues. We claim that emotional labor is not fully recognized even though it is a crucial element in contemporary work contexts. Moreover, although employees-qua-emotion-workers perform this role in both work and non-work contexts and though they suffer emotionally when their relation to workplace-qua-social context ceases, they are not adequately compensated.

Late modern era is claimed to promote the fragmentation and multiplication of identities. However, in our case study, we observe that the family discourse prevalent in work and non-work contexts brings the work and non-work identities together under the same unitary discourse. First, family is imported into work contexts to promote workplace commitment through social and emotional bonds between colleagues. Second, colleagues are translated into friends – even into a second family – and they are exported to non-work contexts. Individuals thus forge their work and non-work identities into an alloyed identity that covers both life spheres. In the example of Rainbow, the work organization contributes actively to the construction of this quasi-unitary identity. We argue that, in late modernity, institutionalized work organizations emerge as fertile contexts to challenge fragmented identities and to struggle to cultivate more wholesome yet work-rooted identities.

Emotional exploitation and the alloy of work and non-work identities risk culminating into ‘alienation from non-work life’. We claim that over-socialization into work contexts risks to inhibit involvement with other social circles and to weaken the bonds to non-work friends, activity partners or even family. In the case of retirement or leaving work, individuals get aware of their alienation from non-work aspects of their lives. Indeed, they may even occasionally return to their workplaces to regain the meaning of their lives.

The discourse of individualism is a dominant theme in late modernity. However, in our study, the dominant discourse of family praises and legitimizes the demands of collectivist institutions over self-centered individual demands. Indeed, we note that this discourse is even discriminative against ‘individualist individuals’. In addition to the continuing influence of the most primary institution, family, we argue that ascendant institutions such as workplace replace

traditional institutions. Therefore, we claim that late modern contexts foreshadow the return of collectivism, if not traditionalism.

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