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Chapter 2

The Eye Sees What The Mind Knows:

The Conceptual Foundations Of Invisible Work

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Work can be invisible in two broad ways. First, within the domain of work, some forms of work are celebrated and highly valued while other forms are marginalized or not even socially recognized as work. In this way, undervalued and overlooked forms of work are “invisible labor.” The classic example is unpaid household work, but the chapters in this volume illustrate that invisible labor can take many forms. Second, within the broader sociopolitical/socioeconomic realm, other issues and interests are commonly prioritized over those pertaining to work and workers. For example, labor standards are seldom at the top of the international, national, or local political agenda; employees are typically invisible in corporate governance in Anglosphere countries; and individual members of capitalist societies are seen more as consumers than as workers. In this way, work itself generally is undervalued and overlooked and therefore also warrants an invisible label.

The different forms of the invisibility of work undoubtedly reflect complex sets of factors, including power relations, gender norms, and labor market dynamics. This chapter focuses on the

conceptual foundations of invisible work. The premise of this chapter is reflected in an adage that states that the eye sees what the mind knows. We only see and value work when it conforms to our mental models of what work is. In the public imagination, why is work less visible than other key aspects of human life? It is so because dominant ways of thinking about work reduce it to a curse or a commodified, instrumental activity that supports consumption. So we do not think of work as having deeper value; therefore, we overlook work in favor of other human activities. Similarly, why are certain forms of work invisible? They are because when we think of work in certain ways—especially as a commodified, instrumental activity—forms of work that are considered different from or only weakly fulfilling these dominant conceptualizations of work are devalued and rendered invisible.

In these ways, then, how we think about and how we conceptualize work have real consequences for what is seen and valued as work. Unfortunately, conceptualizations of work are frequently narrowly conceived and are typically unstated. To better understand issues of invisible work and questions about what forms of work are valued and why, it is important to *explicitly* consider the diverse ways in which work can be conceptualized. This chapter therefore draws on my (Budd) 2011 book, *The Thought of Work*, to present a framework of 10 conceptualizations of work that synthesize contemporary and historical thinking about work—and invisibility.

By making these conceptualizations explicit, this chapter provides a foundation for thinking more clearly about how we define work and for gaining a deeper understanding of why (some) work is invisible. By broadening our thinking on work, this framework can further provide a foundation for crafting inclusive definitions of work that recognize not only the deep

importance of work for individuals and society but also the value of diverse forms of human activity that should be fully embraced as work rather than overlooked or marginalized. In short, in order for the eye to recognize wider forms of work, we need to train the mind to think more broadly and deeply about work.

BROADENING THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF WORK

Work can be a challenge to define. It is defined here as purposeful human activity involving physical or mental exertion that is not undertaken solely for pleasure and that has economic or symbolic value. The first part of this definition (“purposeful human activity”) distinguishes work from the broader realm of all human effort. The second part (“not undertaken solely for pleasure”) separates work from leisure while allowing for work to be pleasurable and thereby recognizing that there can sometimes be a nebulous boundary between work and leisure. The final part (“that has economic or symbolic value”) allows work to be more encompassing than paid employment by also including unpaid caring for others, self-employment, subsistence farming, casual work in the informal sector, and other activities outside the standard Western boundaries of paid jobs and career aspirations. The purpose of this broad definition of work is to encompass the diverse conceptualizations of work found across the spectrum of work-related theorizing and analyses, not to precisely delimit what is and is not considered work (Glucksman 1995).

From this broad definition of *work*, I identify 10 conceptualizations of work that capture the rich ways in which work has been modeled in the behavioral, social, and philosophical

sciences; these conceptualizations provide the range of possible individual and social meanings of work: work as curse, freedom, commodity, occupational citizenship, disutility, personal fulfillment, social relation, caring for others, identity, and service. These conceptualizations are summarized in the middle column of Table 1 [on page 000] and presented in the remainder of this section. For the rich bodies of scholarship that lie behind each conceptualization, see Budd (2011). The connections to invisible work are briefly noted in this section and then described more fully in the following section after the entire framework of conceptualizations has been presented.

<insert Table 1 near here>

Work as a Curse

For thousands of years, work has been seen as painful toil necessary for survival that conflicts with life's more virtuous or pleasurable pursuits. When it is assumed that God or nature requires all or some to engage in arduous or dirty work, then work is conceptualized as a curse. Seeing hard work as a God-given curse has deep roots in Western thought. The Judeo-Christian tradition and Greco-Roman mythology share a common story in which humans originally did not have to work (at least not very hard), but a displeased god (for example, the Judeo-Christian God punishing Adam for his disobedience in the Garden of Eden or Zeus punishing humankind because Prometheus stole fire for it) punishes humans with toil. Hard work is thereby seen as a necessary part of the human experience but not as one of the higher purposes of the human experience. So by emphasizing the importance of other human activities, seeing work as a necessary evil contributes to the invisibility of work.

Elite segments of societies also tend to see the lower classes as occupying their natural place in the social and occupational hierarchy. Perhaps most famously, Aristotle reasoned that

nature creates humans of varying intellectual abilities and that the intellectually inferior are naturally suited to be slaves. More recently, the belief in a natural ordering of work is reflected in Herrnstein and Murray's (1994) claims in *The Bell Curve* that contemporary America is stratified by genetically determined intellectual ability. The marginalization in contemporary Western societies of some occupations as "women's work" or as fit only for minorities or immigrants can similarly reflect a belief in a natural social hierarchy. In this way, less desirable forms of work are conceptualized as a curse of the lower classes, a view that in turn renders this work invisible to elite segments of society, who see themselves as engaged in more valuable forms of labor.

Work as Freedom

For much of human history, work was typically seen as forced by God, nature, custom, law, or physical violence. The centrality of the individual and freedom in modern Western thought, however, provides the basis for conceptualizing work as a source of freedom in several ways. One strain of this thinking is freedom from nature. This line of thought emphasizes the creative nature of work that is done independently of the daily necessities of nature. In this way, a worker is a creator—someone who "rebels against nature's dictates" (Mokyr 1990:viii) and is able "to impose culture" on the natural world (Wallman 1979:1). Ideally, creative work allows us "to be ourselves, set our own schedules, do challenging work and live in communities that reflect our values and priorities" (Florida 2002:10).

Other ways of thinking about work as freedom pertain to individual liberty from the coercion of other people. John Locke famously argued in the seventeenth century that labor is the foundation for political freedom because it establishes ownership of private property. In other words, by being able to control the fruits of your own labor, work can be a classical source of

liberty not from nature but from other humans and human institutions. This theorizing on the roots of political freedom also has important implications for economic liberalism (Macpherson 1962). When work is conceptualized as one's own property, workers become free to sell their labor for pay if they so choose. Moreover, when a person's work is hers and hers alone, there are no social obligations or limitations on how much she can accumulate through her work. Wage work and unchecked capitalist accumulation are therefore given moral approval, and the foundation is laid for seeing work as an economic commodity to be bought and sold in free markets. Such perspectives are reinforced by the legal systems of capitalist economies in which work is seen as an activity undertaken by individuals who are free to pursue occupations of their choosing and to quit at will. From this standpoint, employment is a contractual relation between legal equals, albeit with continuing tensions between the unrestricted freedom derived from legal principles of free contracting and the lingering influence of status-based standards (Deakin and Wilkinson 2005). Seeing work as freedom is important for the invisibility of work because work that fails to fulfill the standards created by various perspectives on freedom—such as work that lacks creativity or fails to provide economic independence—is devalued relative to work that meets these standards.

Work as a Commodity

The emergence of Western liberalism created a new conceptualization of work: “What could be more natural in a social universe composed of separate and autonomous individuals whose chief occupation was trading commodities back and forth than that some individuals should sell the property in their labor to other individuals, to whom thereafter it would belong?” (Steinfeld 1991:92). In this way work comes to be seen as a commodity in which an individual's

capacity to work—what Marx called “labor power”—is viewed as an abstract quantity that can be bought and sold. Diverse forms of concrete labor are all reduced to sources of economic value that can be made equivalent by exchanging them at an appropriate set of relative prices. Work is thought of as a generic input into a production function, and employers and workers buy and sell generic units of this commodity called *work* or *labor* (or *labor power* in Marxist terminology).

Mainstream (neoclassical) economic thought embraces the commodity conceptualization of work. Employers are assumed to maximize their profits by utilizing the optimum amounts of labor, capital, and other inputs to produce goods and services for sale. Work and workers are thus treated like any other factor of production. On the supply side, work is something that individuals choose to sell in varying quantities in order to earn income and maximize their individual or household utility. Employers and employees are therefore both modeled as treating hours of labor as one of a number of quantities to factor into the relevant optimization problem; marginal analysis determines the optimum amount of labor to buy or sell in the labor market no differently than it determines the exchange of other commodities. Moreover, when one sees work as a commodity, its allocation is seen as governed by the impersonal “laws” of supply and demand. The intersection of labor supply and labor demand determines the terms and conditions of employment, and work is analyzed like all other economic commodities—“the theory of the determination of wages in a free market is simply a special case of the general theory of value” (Hicks 1963:1). The commodity perspective is instructive for considerations of the invisibility of labor because it reveals why paid work, and especially highly paid work, is privileged over other forms.

Work as Occupational Citizenship

Work can also be conceptualized not as an activity undertaken by autonomous individuals but as one undertaken by citizens who are part of human communities. To see workers as citizens is to decommodify them, to give them a status as more than just factors of production or individuals seeking personal fulfillment or identities (Standing 2009). Specifically, citizens should be seen as having inherent equal worth and thus entitled to certain rights and standards of dignity and self-determination irrespective of what the market provides. Work, then, is conceptualized as occupational citizenship when we think of what it means for workers to be citizens of a human community.

Industrial relations research (e.g., Budd 2004) and legal scholarship (e.g., Crain 2010) frequently argue that citizen-workers are entitled to minimum working and living conditions that are determined by standards of human dignity, not by supply and demand, and to meaningful forms of self-determination in the workplace that go beyond the freedom to quit. Closely related approaches include conceptualizations of workers' rights as human rights, the International Labour Organization's campaign for decent work, and various theological and ethical approaches that emphasize that work should respect standards of human dignity. From these perspectives, the invisibility of work is a significant concern because all forms of work should be valued, and all workers should enjoy decent conditions, although there tends to be a bias towards traditional views that equate work with paid employment.

Work as Disutility

In mainstream economic theorizing, individuals are modeled as rational agents seeking to maximize a utility function that is increasing in the consumption of goods, services, and leisure. Work is a central element of an individual's maximization problem because work yields goods and services directly through self-production or indirectly through earned income. However, the physical and mental activity of working is seen as *reducing* one's utility. This perspective on work has two roots: seeing it as a painful or stressful activity and seeing it as something that is less pleasurable than leisure since work involves the opportunity cost of reduced time for pleasurable leisure (Spencer 2009). In either case, work is conceptualized as *disutility*—an unpleasant activity tolerated only to obtain goods, services, and leisure that provide pleasure. This conceptualization further perpetuates the negative views of work that originally arose from seeing work as a curse and therefore has similar implications for the invisibility of labor.

When imperfect information makes employment contracts incomplete, economists frequently assume that employers face a principal–agent problem—how to get the agent (in this case, a worker) to act in the interests of the principal (in this case, the owners of the organization). This assumption is made because work is being conceptualized as disutility, so workers are presumed to want to exert minimal levels of effort (“shirking”). By assuming that monitoring workers is typically difficult or imperfect, theorizing in personnel and organizational economics thereby focuses on solving these principal–agent problems by using optimal monetary incentives to combat disutility by making additional worker effort utility-enhancing (Lazear 1995). This monetary emphasis parallels the materialistic focus of the work-as-a-commodity

perspective and similarly privileges highly compensated jobs, an effect that renders other forms of work invisible.

Work as Personal Fulfillment

A focus on the positive and negative physical and especially on the psychological outcomes that are inherent in work creates a conceptualization of work as personal fulfillment. In this way of thinking, work is cognitively and emotionally directed by the brain. Mental states such as attitudes, moods, and emotions can affect individuals' work behaviors; the nature of one's work—such as the job tasks, rewards, relations with coworkers, and supervision—can affect one's mental state. As such, work is viewed as an activity that arouses cognitive and affective functioning. Ideally, work should be a source of personal fulfillment and psychological well-being that satisfies needs for achievement, mastery, self-esteem, and self-worth (Turner, Barling, and Zacharatos 2002). But work with mindless repetition, abusive coworkers or bosses, excessive physical or mental demands, or other factors that comprise unpleasant work can have negative psychological consequences.

The centrality of cognitive and affective mental processes for conceptualizing work is emphasized most strongly by scholars in industrial-organizational psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management. Some key foundational research topics that result from conceptualizing work in this way are individual psychological differences such as cognitive ability or personality, job satisfaction, organizational justice, and intrinsic work motivation. Human resource management scholarship builds on the conceptualization of work as personal fulfillment by assuming that to be effective, human resource management practices must satisfy

workers' psychological needs by managing their cognitive and affective functioning. This is typically seen as a win-win situation by embracing a unitarist vision of the employment relationship that assumes that the interests of workers and their organizations can be aligned: Psychological needs can be fulfilled through fair treatment, intrinsic rewards, and placement of workers into appropriate jobs; employees will reciprocate by being hardworking and loyal; and high levels of organizational performance, including profitability and shareholder returns, will result. An important implication for the invisibility of labor is that work that fails to conform to these norms is seen as anomalous and therefore receives less attention and respect.

Work as a Social Relation

The extrinsic rewards of work emphasized in mainstream economics or the intrinsic rewards emphasized in psychology underappreciate the extent to which work is embedded in complex social phenomena such that individuals seek approval, status, sociability, and power. The social context also provides constraints such as (a) social norms that define the boundaries of acceptable behaviors or work roles or (b) power relations that define access to resources. To regard work as consisting of human interactions that are experienced within and shaped by social networks, social norms, and institutions and that are socially constructed power relations is to conceptualize work as social relation. The invisibility of work is therefore seen as constructed by these social forces, and the path to combatting problems of invisible labor is to change these social forces.

Three major approaches to thinking about work occurring within a rich social context are instructive. First, the social dynamics of interpersonal work interactions are highlighted by theories of social exchange and social networks (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005; Portes 1998).

Work is thus seen as a social exchange consisting of open-ended, ongoing relationships occurring within networks of social ties based on trust and reciprocity that have imperfectly specified obligations and a multiplicity of objectives. A second approach to conceptualizing work as a social relation focuses on the importance of social norms for how work is experienced and structured. These norms can stem from direct, interpersonal contact—such as norms in work groups to limit output or work effort—while other norms are organizational in nature, and still other work norms are societal-level constructions.

A third social relations approach emphasizes socially constructed hierarchies and power relations. For example, Marxist-inspired theorizing on work embraces a social relations conceptualization of work by seeing capital–labor or employer–employee power dynamics as socially constructed. Work, then, is viewed as contested terrain in which employers and employees continuously seek control and make accommodations. This dialectic of control and accommodation can occur through formal policies, rules, and other structural features of the employment relationship (Thompson and Newsome 2004) as well as through an organization’s culture and other discursive elements (Knights and Willmott 1989). Another approach that emphasizes socially constructed hierarchies consists of feminist theories of patriarchy and gender (Gottfried 2006).

Work Caring for Others

The traditional conceptualizations of work in the social and behavioral sciences and in the accompanying research that primarily focuses on paid employment to the exclusion of unpaid household work and other caring activities that do not produce economic commodities are criticized by feminist scholarship for ignoring gender issues (Gottfried 2006). Feminist thought

rejects the resulting devaluing of “woman’s work” and asserts that it should be seen as real work. Specifically, it is work as caring for others—the physical, cognitive, and emotional effort required to attend to and maintain others.

While caring for others is not limited to unpaid household work and is not the exclusive domain of women, it powerfully affects the gendered work experiences of women. Housewives are frequently seen as unproductive, working women are often saddled with a majority of the burdens of household work, and women in the workplace face gendered expectations about appropriate occupations and work behaviors that are frequently rooted in idealized visions of caring, domesticity, and femininity. In feminist theorizing, this gendered nature of work—and thus the invisibility of “woman’s work”—is the result of socially constructed norms and power dynamics, not maternal instincts or other biological features (Jackson 1998).

Work as Identity

To help understand who they are, individuals create identities that enhance their comprehension of where they fit into the broader world. Given that work is a significant part of many people's lives, work can be conceptualized as identity—that is, as a source of understanding and meaning (Leidner 2006). Work can be a source of meaning on several levels. The personal identity dimension consists of stable attributes and traits that an individual sees as making himself unique, including descriptors related to his work. The social identity approach highlights identity construction via categorizing oneself into various groups, such as one's occupation and employer. The interactionist approach focuses on the role of social interactions in creating individual identities. From this perspective, the social roles attached to occupations and careers are a major source of one's self-presentation and identity. Identity related to class and class consciousness is also rooted in work.

At a more fundamental level, work can be viewed as a central element of creating a species identity for humans. The importance of work for humanness was most famously advanced by Marx's ([1844] 1988) argument that “[i]n creating an objective world by his practical activity, in working-up inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species being, i.e., as a being that treats the species as its own essential being” (pp. 76–77). It is from this belief that self-directed work is the essential quality of being human that Marx further argued that the commodification of work causes alienation—the loss of humanness experienced when workers are forced to sell an inherent part of themselves. In the 1981 papal encyclical *Laborem Exercens*

[On Human Work], Pope John Paul II articulated the importance of work in terms strikingly similar to those presented by Marx:

Work is one of the characteristics that distinguish man from the rest of creatures, whose activity for sustaining their lives cannot be called work. Only man is capable of work, and only man works, at the same time by work occupying his existence on earth. Thus work bears a particular mark of man and of humanity, the mark of a person operating within a community of persons. And this mark decides its interior characteristics; in a sense it constitutes its very nature. (Preface, emphasis omitted)

While the differing views on work as identify differ as to the depth of work's contributions to an individual's identity, they all share a concern with the invisibility of work because work should be valued and respected, not invisible, in order to contribute to a positive self-identity.

Work as Service

Since the early years of the Christian church, work has been seen as a way to serve God's kingdom by preventing idleness (leading to sin), providing for one's family, and generating surpluses for charitable giving. Later, Martin Luther and John Calvin further enhanced the status of daily work by believing that everyone's (nonsinful) occupation represents something that God summons us to do by providing special gifts or talents—that is, a calling: “something that fits how we were made, so that doing it will enable us to glorify God, serve others, and be most richly ourselves” (Placher 2005:3). Furthermore, today's Christian theology of work is frequently complemented by a conceptualization of work as an act of cocreation with God, as captured here by Pope John Paul II (1981) in *Laborem Exercens*:

Awareness that man's work is a participation in God's activity ought to permeate . . . even the most ordinary everyday activities. For, while providing the substance of life for themselves and their families, men and women are performing their activities in a way which appropriately benefits society. They can justly consider that by their labor they are unfolding the Creator's work, consulting the advantages of their brothers and sisters, and contributing by their personal industry to the realization in history of the divine plan. (sec. 25)

Whether for religious or secular reasons, a popular way of serving a community is through volunteering. Even though volunteering is typically unpaid or minimally paid, it should be seen as work because it involves effort, produces value, and is structured by the same factors that shape paid work, such as labor market opportunities, individual motivation, social norms, and gender (Taylor 2005). There are diverse reasons why individuals pursue or are encouraged to pursue volunteer work, civic service, and community building. Helping others who are impoverished frequently stems from humanitarian concerns motivated by religious and/or ethical principles. In a very different vein, the classical republicanism school of thought in political philosophy emphasizes civic virtue in order to hold a community or a nation together. Serving others is also advocated as a way of repaying one's debt to society while military service is frequently seen as patriotic service for one's country.

Confucianism provides another foundation for seeing work as service. Specifically, the centrality of the family in Confucian thought means that in East Asia work is frequently seen as serving the multigenerational family and the common good, not the individual. As the East Asian

countries have become industrialized, Confucian values have also carried over into the employment relationship for wage and salary workers. The Japanese ideal of lifetime employment in which employees are recruited for and expected to stay at the company for their working lives can be seen as a reflection of the Confucian importance of familial reciprocity and loyalty, even if this ideal is a reality for only a minority of the workforce. In other words, working for the family becomes working for the corporate family.

So in addition to contemporary Western conceptualizations of work that are typically individual-centric—whether serving an individual’s and her immediate family’s needs for income, psychological fulfillment, social recognition, identity, and caring—work can also serve God, humanity, or one’s country, community, or family. In these ways, work can be thought of as service. This view connects to concerns with the invisibility of work because individual-centric norms on work tend to exclude service-based forms of work from definitions of real work and therefore deny service work the same social legitimacy and economic value as afforded to other forms of work.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF WORK FOR INVISIBLE WORK

This framework of 10 conceptualizations of work can deepen our understanding of many aspects of work. Of particular interest here are the implications for invisible labor (see the last column of Table 1 on p. 000). Taken individually, each conceptualization helps reveal why some forms of work are valued more than others. Taken as a set, the conceptualizations explicitly uncover the limits that have been placed on what counts as work and thereby illuminate the aspects of work that need to be added to our mental models of work in order to reduce the

invisibility of specific forms of work. Moreover, the set of conceptualizations provides new insights as to why work in general is often invisible in the public imagination, the political arena, and other domains. The next section first discusses the implications of the conceptualizations for the invisibility of specific forms of work and then concludes with implications for the broader invisibility of work.

The Invisibility of Specific Forms of Work

The earliest conceptualization of work as a curse devalues work by seeing it as a predetermined burden, especially for those who are viewed as naturally suited for certain types of tasks. For example, when caring activities are seen as the natural realm of women because of female biological and personality traits, these activities then become less valued as work because they are regarded as women's natural roles. Similarly, if certain types of individuals are seen as being equipped for performing only mundane or other undesirable tasks and as lacking the aptitude or drive for mastering more complex jobs, it then becomes easier for elites who hold these prejudicial views to dismiss concerns about the conditions endured by these workers because they are viewed as these workers' natural burden. In these ways, women and ethnic minorities have been discriminated against for centuries, and their work has been rendered less valuable and therefore invisible by elite segments of society.

When work is conceptualized as a commodity, then what counts as work is that which is perceived as creating economic value by being exchanged in labor markets. Unpaid household work, indigenous activities like hunting, and other nonmarket forms of work are therefore dismissed—as illustrated by the long-standing and prejudicial labeling of indigenous activities as “primitive.” Moreover, when markets are seen as the arbiters of value, as in mainstream

neoclassical economic thought and in neoliberal market ideology, not only is market exchange required to indicate value creation, but the level of compensation is also taken as an indicator of the value and importance of the work. Lowly paid work is therefore devalued and rendered less visible than highly paid work. The conceptualization of work as disutility reinforces this last implication because from this perspective, the *raison d'être* of work is supporting consumption, so unpaid or lowly paid work that fails to support high levels of consumption is less likely to be valued and visible.

Those who embrace the commodity and disutility conceptualizations of work generally see markets as natural (witness the rhetorical support for “free markets” and markets’ lack of regulation) while also assuming that work is not pleasurable. These views are similar to those associated with seeing work as a curse—just replace the determination of natural forces with the determination of the market. In contrast, a social relations perspective on work sees markets as socially determined via laws pertaining to property rights, contracts, fraud, coercion, and other key elements that ultimately reflect and reinforce power relations between competing groups. A social relations conceptualization of work also emphasizes the importance of social norms. As such, a social relations perspective on work importantly implies that whether specific forms of work are visible or invisible is the result of socially created institutions, power structures, and norms. The invisibility of labor is therefore within our control as a society.

Other conceptualizations highlight different aspects of these norms and thereby illustrate why different forms of work may or may not be invisible. When work is viewed as freedom, then forms of work that fail to achieve economic independence—such as unpaid household caring activities—or that lack creativity—such as low-skilled, repetitive jobs—are less likely to be valued and visible. Similarly, if work is embraced as personal fulfillment, then work that does

not provide intrinsic rewards is less likely to be valued and visible, though this viewpoint can be a double-edged sword because if real work is supposed to be hard (recall curse and disutility), then work that is overly pleasurable might be dismissed as not being true work. Work done solely for an individual's pleasure is not recognized by the U.S. legal system as real work and therefore is not covered by employment and labor law (Crain, this volume). The conceptualizations of work as caring and service also reveal that when these forms of work fall outside the norms of what is deemed to be work, these forms of work are then rendered invisible. Caring activities, for example, might be seen as acts of love rather than work. Similarly, volunteering might be regarded as a duty, an altruistic activity, or other things, but not as real work. As such, it is invisible.

Individual conceptualizations of work are also important for revealing why invisible labor is a problem. Seeing work as personal fulfillment and identity brings the importance of physical safety, psychological well-being, and the ability to craft a healthy identity to the fore. These standards are harder to achieve when work is invisible because invisible work can have fewer legal protections and less social recognition. Consequently, all forms of work, including caring and service work, should be valued as real work rather than left as invisible. The occupational citizenship and freedom ways of thinking about work also highlight the connections between work and democracy. Invisible labor can be detrimental to democratic participation by denying workers the resources, the agency, and the skills to be fully deliberative citizens whose voices will be heard. Feminist scholarship that critically explores the conceptualization of work as caring also shows how norms that render household work invisible also have negative ramifications in the sphere of paid employment. Specifically, beliefs about the gendered body in the workplace and the caregiving responsibilities of women lead to employment-related

discrimination as men and women are segregated into different occupations, given different roles and levels of responsibility, expected to sell or tolerate differing levels of sexuality, and paid differently for performing comparable work.

The General Invisibility of Work

Turning to the invisibility of work generally, the broad set of conceptualizations of work helps us understand why this invisibility is the case. Specifically, the conceptualizations as a set reveal the narrowness with which work is viewed, especially in the dominant neoliberal market paradigm. The combination of seeing work as simultaneously a curse, a commodity, and a disutility reduces work to an unpleasant activity beyond our control—that is, we must take what God, nature, or the market determines. And this activity largely has instrumental benefits, especially productivity for society and income for individuals and their families. From such a narrow perspective, it naturally follows that individuals should be seeking pleasure and deep meaning from other life spheres. Moreover, if work is largely about economic productivity and value, then public policies and organizational strategies will prioritize conditions that are seen as fostering value creation—such as labor market deregulation and unfettered corporate decision-making—rather than prioritize labor standards and worker well-being for all workers.

Note carefully that it takes a broad conceptual foundation to not only reveal how work is conceptualized but also how it is not. The extrinsic emphasis of the neoliberal market ideology overlooks other critical aspects of work that are highlighted by other conceptualizations, especially freedom (and thus democracy), psychological health, identity, caring, and serving others. With a truncated recognition of the deep benefits of work along with a perceived lack of

control over work and its conditions, other elements of life are regarded as more important and within our control. So work becomes invisible relative to other spheres.

Lastly, the conceptualizations of work also point to strategies to reduce the invisibility of labor. While seeing work as a curse or a commodity largely puts work beyond our control, the occupational citizenship conceptualization of work advocates institutional intervention to improve market-based outcomes. Even more robustly, a social relations perspective highlights the need to change deeply held social norms, an action that could then bring greater recognition to work generally and also to undervalued and overlooked forms of work. Other conceptualizations point toward the needed changes in norms—we need to reduce the degree to which work is seen as a curse, a commodity, and a disutility while seeing work more inclusively as being a necessary source of psychological health and personal identity as well as a way to care for and serve others.

CONCLUSION

The fact that specific forms of work can be invisible underscores the importance of thinking carefully about definitions and conceptualizations of work. Indeed, the argument of this chapter is that our mental models of what work is critically shape our beliefs about who is valued as a worker and what is valued as work. Just as importantly, our intellectual visions of what work is determine what work is not and therefore deny recognition and the corresponding economic, psychological, social, and legal resources to those whose activities are not deemed to be work. Crain (this volume), for example, reveals important problems that result from the narrow definition of work used by the U.S. legal system. Moreover, considerations of invisible labor

should not overlook the fact that work in general is often rendered invisible because it is overshadowed by other human activities and other sociopolitical/socioeconomic interests. Again, the argument here is that these dynamics reflect, at least partly, the embrace of limited mental models of work that have the unfortunate effect of blinding us to the true depth and breadth of the importance of work.

On multiple levels, then, the extent to which work is visible and valued, or is not, rests in important ways on how we think about work. It is therefore essential that we explicitly identify alternative ways to think about work and understand their implications for invisible labor. To really understand invisible labor, we need to recognize not only what is valued but also what is not. So a broad conceptual framework is needed. In practice, we also need to broaden the dominant conceptualizations of work in order to give all forms of work the recognition that they deserve. Work should not be narrowly seen solely as a commodified economic transaction that provides income but instead should be robustly visible as a fully human activity necessary for reproductive as well as productive activities that have deep importance for our individual and collective material and psychological health as well as for the quality of democracy and other social relations (Boyte and Kari 1996; Budd 2011; Crain 2010).

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Table 1: A Framework for Conceptualizing Work and the Implications for Invisible Labor

Work as . . .	Definition	Implications for Invisible Labor
1. A Curse	An unquestioned burden necessary for human survival or maintenance of the social order	Devaluing of work is preordained by the natural order; other human activities are more important.
2. Freedom	A way to achieve independence from nature or other humans and to express human creativity	Work that fails to achieve economic independence or lacks creativity is less likely to be valued and visible.
3. A Commodity	An abstract quantity of productive effort that has tradable economic value	Visible work is exchanged in primary labor markets; high pay is required to indicate economic value.
4. Occupational Citizenship	An activity pursued by human members of a community entitled to certain rights	All forms of work should be valued more highly, with rights provided to all types of workers.
5. Disutility	An unpleasant activity tolerated to obtain goods and services that provide pleasure	Work that does not support high levels of consumption is less likely to be valued and visible.
6. Personal Fulfillment	Physical and psychological functioning that (ideally) satisfies individual needs	Work that does not provide intrinsic rewards is less likely to be valued and visible.
7. A Social Relation	Human interaction embedded in social norms, institutions, and power structures	The invisibility of work reflects socially created institutions and power structures.
8. Caring for Others	The physical, cognitive, and emotional effort required to attend to and maintain others	Though frequently invisible, caring work should be valued as real work.
9. Identity	A method for understanding who you are and where you stand in the social structure	All forms of work should be valued more highly and be more visible.
10. Service	The devotion of effort to others, such as God, household, community, or country	Though frequently invisible, service toward others should be valued as real work.