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Feminism Facing Industrial Relations in Britain

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Abstract

This is an opportune time to renegotiate the boundaries between industrial relations theory and feminist analysis in Britain. Such a bargain would involve going beyond an agreement to add 'women's issues' to the research agenda, to a recognition of the gendered character of employment relations and of work itself. The formal institutions involved, namely, management, trade unions and the state, cannot be treated as gender-neutral. Further, the very way industrial relations scholars define what is 'inside' the industrial relations system and what is 'outside' reflects masculine priorities and privilege.

1. Introduction

Our conception of industrial relations as a field of inquiry has changed over the last decade alongside the political and industrial landscape in the UK. The decline in collective bargaining coverage, union density and strikes means that these can no longer be the central preoccupations of those working in the field. The focus has extended from the management of industrial conflict to a concern with the employment relationship more broadly. One result of this shift has been an increased awareness of the gendered character of employment relations. Yet a glance at the contents of the mainstream journals and textbooks indicates that, although some progress has been made, gender issues remain marginal to much of the current research agenda. While feminist scholarship has reshaped the social sciences, it has made surprisingly few inroads into the field of industrial relations — this despite the feminization of the paid labour force, one of the most important social changes in the twentieth century.

Industrial relations research is commonly criticized for the primacy it accords to the description of the institutions of trade unions and collective bargaining arrangements at the expense of social processes such as influence and mobilization (Bain and Clegg 1974; Kelly 1998). It is much less

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recognized that this continuing institutionalist bias has been associated with gender blindness. The major institutions analysed — that is management, trade unions and the state — which appear in the literature as gender neutral are indeed profoundly gendered. The tendency in industrial relations studies to overlook the masculinity of their usual subjects means that aspects of employment and industrial relations systems remain hidden. To demonstrate this I will draw on related disciplines, such as sociology, organization and management studies, which seem to have been more receptive to the idea that the gender of employees and managers does matter. I go on to discuss how the decline in manufacturing and the growth of services has altered the nature of work, highlighting the significance of gender and personal identity to the performance of particular kinds of work. Finally, I argue that, while feminist theory has deconstructed the divide between work and home, between the public and the private, much industrial relations research continues to operate with this dichotomy.

This article considers the extent of, and the reasons for, the continuing absence of regular and systematic consideration of gender in industrial relations analysis. While some questions relating to women's work have been taken up, notably sex segregation in the labour market and equal pay, women are generally treated as a special case in that men are still assumed to be the universal standard against which women are measured. It is women who are marked as 'gendered', the ones who are different. As a result, insufficient attention has been paid to the social processes involved in the sex-typing of jobs and to the ways in which discrimination against women is institutionalized in the labour market. This is because power-based gender relations has been defined as *outside* the scope of industrial relations. I will argue that remedying this is not a matter of simply adding women on, or including studies of 'women's issues'. Rather, we need to recognize the gendered character of work itself and to integrate this understanding into the field's research agenda.

2. Putting women in the picture

That women are still marginal to the study of industrial relations is apparent from a survey of the major journals and textbooks over the last ten years.[1] Although women workers increasingly have received attention, there is little recognition that the experiences of work and the workplace may be very different for men and women. For example, in the *British Journal of Industrial Relations* gender issues have been raised mainly in relation to three topics: equal pay/wages structures (Rubery 1992; Gilbert and Secker 1995; Rubery 1997), discrimination in training (Miller 1994; Green and Zanchi 1997; Wooden and VandenHeuvel 1997), and unionization (Sinclair 1995). Australian and Canadian industrial relations journals similarly maintain women's invisibility except in relation to a few recognized areas, that is, labour market discrimination and part-time/precarious employment.

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Indeed, the gender bias of Australian, British and Canadian industrial relations theory has been the subject of critiques by Pocock (1997), Rubery and Fagan (1995) and Forrest (1993) respectively. Interestingly, the US journals fare better. The *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* (Cornell) has performed particularly well, in terms of both the number and breadth of articles on gender, perhaps because there are more senior women in the faculty and on their editorial board. In Britain, by contrast, the academic field in still largely peopled by men.

Increasingly, industrial relations textbooks do now include a chapter dealing with 'women's issues', either on equal opportunities (e.g. Liff in Edwards 1995) or sex segregation in the labour market (e.g. Rubery and Fagan, in Hyman and Ferner 1994). The indexes of several popular textbooks (Blyton and Turnbull 1998; Edwards 1995; Farnham and Pimlott 1995; Hyman and Ferner 1994; Kessler and Bayliss 1995) contain many entries under 'women', for example on equal opportunities, low pay, part-time work, labour flexibility and trade unions. Significantly, there are no entries under 'men' or male workers. This betrays the assumption implicit in these key texts that industrial relations is in fact the study of men. There is certainly more consideration than a decade ago of women's relationship to the institutions that are the focus of other chapters. However, a gender analysis is not fully integrated into the subject matter as a whole.

Although the traditional research bias towards manufacturing industries is no longer so pronounced, we still know a great deal more about manufacturing than private sector services, and about male manual workers compared with female clerical workers (see Lucas 1996; Rubery and Fagan 1995). In addition, the focus on the institutions of collective bargaining means that workers who are outside the formally constituted labour market, such as homeworkers, paid domestic workers, teleworkers and the self-employed, seldom feature.

The predominant masculine orientation of industrial relations cannot be explained as an accurate reflection of the current state of research on work and employment. There is a burgeoning literature on gender and work, unions and the state in the companion fields of history, political science, sociology and law. In these fields, feminism has reinvigorated research and extended the traditional scope of inquiry. To try to understand the industrial relations orientation, let us look at two issues that have been commonly canvassed *within* industrial relations: gender pay differentials and sex segregation in employment.

3. Raising women's pay

The dimensions of pay inequality have been the subject of much excellent work, especially by labour market economists. It is important to consider why this issue has been taken up, the way in which it has been taken up, and why it has not spurred on a more thoroughgoing gender analysis within the

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field of industrial relations. This is necessary for a more profound understanding of unequal pay as well as of the way gender relations underpin the structure of the labour market.

Pay is a central issue in industrial relations. It was the key bargaining issue in the postwar era, a period during which workers won real wage rises through industrial campaigns. Although the agenda has shifted in more recent times to issues such as job security and working hours, pay remains a central issue in bargaining. At the same time, we live in a society where money is the measure of all things including equality and social justice. The fetishist character of money has far-reaching consequences. A core value of democratic societies is a liberal commitment to equality between the sexes. Clearly, one form of equality crucial to gender equity is the distribution of real per capita income. It is key to women's economic independence in an age where the ideal of the 'family wage' is losing its normative salience. Studying the gender pay gap has considerable appeal as a way to open and close the equality question.

Research on pay inequality is also methodologically attractive because levels of pay are easily quantifiable and generalizable across all manner of jobs and employees. There are writers within industrial relations who have demonstrated that wages reflect all kinds of historical and institutional assumptions (e.g. Brown and Nolan 1988; Rubery 1997), but for some researchers a focus on pay means being able to operate within the relative comfort of the neoclassical framework of the theory of wages. Researchers 'are therefore absolved from having to worry too much about the operation of the "black box" which is the organisation' (Arrowsmith and Sisson 1999: 72).[2] Human agency is lost behind the statistics. Thus, many authors who address the issue of pay differences conceptualize the problem as one of measurement; they describe what is. Authors who do attempt to explain pay inequality generally do so in terms of occupational segregation. There is now a mini industry, for example, debating the 'correct' measures of sex segregation (see e.g. Blackburn *et al.* 1993). The nature of the substantive conclusions one can draw is barely affected by the measures that are used. Sex segregation is primarily of interest in so far as it can be correlated with pay differentials.

Obviously, knowledge of the patterning of pay inequalities is extremely valuable and has considerable policy relevance. However, what is missing from most of this literature is any sustained attempt to explain why sex segregation comes about and how it is maintained. For example, women's pay inequality may well arise because women's skills and predominantly female areas of work are undervalued; but why is it that these skills and workplaces are underrated? Rather than looking at the processes by which jobs themselves become sex-typed, many authors focus on manipulating the data in ever more sophisticated ways. As Humphries and Rubery (1995) point out, the unsatisfactory definition of discrimination embedded in economic analyses of the labour market precludes such processes ever being examined.

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Moreover, an overriding concern with equal pay as the ultimate measure of social justice in employment can be seriously misleading. Money is only one form of gender power relations in the workplace and in the labour market. There are many other aspects to power inequality, such as equality of opportunity to pursue careers, or to participate fully in trade unions or works councils, equality in relation to choices about working time and leisure time, and equality of respect and freedom from sexual harassment. Even if women's hourly pay one day reaches that of men's, this will not signify that gender parity has been achieved.

Indeed, industrial relations academics seldom make a connection between the reasons why women's jobs are undervalued and the substantive concerns of their field. The issue is defined as outside the discipline because its genesis is seen to lie in family rather than workplace relations, a point to which I will return. Furthermore, as Forrest (1993: 419) notes: 'The discipline has no interest in the doings of women, or men for that matter; the only "actors" in the "system", to use Dunlop's terminology, are workers, managers, and trade unionists.' As a result, the field has been blind to the gendered character of the institutions that shape work and employment relations.

Let us now turn to look at one of the key institutions that has occupied the attention of industrial relations researchers, namely, trade unions.

4. Trade unions as masculine organizations

Patterns of union growth and decline are key research topics in the industrial relations field. Typically, research on recruitment rates and membership decline examine structural factors, such as movements in the business cycle, the effects of legislation, employers' policies and compositional changes (Bain and Elsheikh 1976; Booth 1995). In the past, women's relationship to trade unions was conventionally analysed rather differently from men's. Evidence was presented to show that women are less likely to join unions (e.g. Clegg 1976). In these studies, the category of women is treated as one variable in an analysis that seeks to capture the complexity of people's experience of trade unions. Their behaviour is generally explained in terms of their sex, which predisposes them to be less interested in unions. By contrast, scholars are not usually inclined to explain men's union activity by reference to 'male' characteristics, or for example the long association between proletarian masculinity and militancy. The implicit assumption in this approach is that unionists are men, while women as workers or trade unionists are deviant from a male norm. 'In this way "women" as a category of analysis has placed over-emphasis on the issue of women-as-women, and problematised that sex, while workers who are men are rarely spoken of with respect to their sex' (Pocock 1997: 6).

It is much more common these days to account for sex differences in membership rates not simply in terms of women's characteristics, but rather in terms of their place in the labour market (Kelly 1990; Heery 1998;

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Williams 1997). For example, Waddington and Whitston (1997: 525) emphasize that any apparent sex differences in the reasons why people join unions, and the methods of their recruitment, are 'a function of employment location rather than sex'. Studies in this vein that compare men and women in similar positions are a welcome advance on the earlier literature. However, they too have their limitations. Explaining women's lower rates of unionization in terms of their concentration in jobs that are 'hard to organize' leaves unexamined why such jobs should be so hard to organize. That women do 'women's work' and that job segregation exists is treated as a fact of life by many scholars of industrial relations, 'rather than [as] an industrial relations phenomenon that needs to be understood from within' (Forrest 1993: 417).

In the absence of any consideration of occupational sex segregation as an institutionalized form of discrimination against women, the implication is that women choose 'women's' work. For example, they 'prefer' part-time jobs because these allow them to accommodate their family responsibilities, and they are content with the low pay attached to 'women's' work because theirs is a second income. The basic flaw in this kind of analysis, as many feminists have argued for a long time, is the simplistic fashion in which the notions of choice and commitment to paid work are deployed (Wajcman 1981; England 1982). The notion of 'commitment' implies that the 'choices' made by married women — such as whether to work part-time or full-time or at all — are a matter of unconstrained will, rather than being heavily conditioned by structured social arrangements that impose limits on what women can do. A useful corrective to this view can be found in Walsh's (1999) recent study, which reveals the diversity among the part-time workforce (see also Crompton 1997).

Much industrial relations literature still stresses the salience of family life for women (at times reflecting an underlying assumption that women's relationship to their work and unions can be deduced from their domestic and family responsibilities), while overlooking the interrelationship between home and work life as experienced by men. Certain factors are defined as appropriate in the study of either women's work or men's, but not in both. Using the distinction made by Feldberg and Glenn (1984), we see that the 'job model' has linked men's work attitudes and behaviour to their occupational experiences, while the 'gender model', invoked only for women, has linked their employment relations to their family experiences. Although it can be difficult to distinguish theoretically between the indirect effects of domestic responsibilities arising from the sexual division of labour in households and the gender effects of processes internal to the labour market, the latter has frequently been neglected in industrial relations.

As a consequence, the structural and cultural mechanisms of unions themselves have rarely been given a central place in explanations of gender differences in participation and power. While there is increasing recognition that collective bargaining has been orientated to the white, full-time male

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work-force, there is less awareness of possible conflicts between the interests of women and 'mainstream' union activities, budgets, priorities and habits of organizing. One exception to this general trend is an examination of why people abandon their union membership (Waddington and Kerr 1999). This shows the extent to which union organization eschews institutions and practices that can maintain union membership among women — in other words, the extent to which unions remain masculine organizations. Colling and Dickens's (1989) observation that the actual ground of collective bargaining is too limited to address effectively the concerns of women, and that existing pay, grading and promotion structures encourage equality issues being seen as minority or sectional interests, is still apt.[3]

Although Fryer *et al.* (1978) previously raised this issue by pointing to the lack of facilities for female shop stewards, the idea that organizational cultures are gendered has only recently been applied to trade unions (see Cunnison and Stageman 1995; Ledwith and Colgan 1996). The dominance of men in unions led to what Pocock (1997: 10) terms 'an assimilationist approach' to women. Concepts of women's deficiencies have often underpinned union analysis and action in relation to the 'problem of women' in unions. Responses to women's under-representation have been constructed around assumptions about women's low levels of knowledge, skills, confidence, and their lack of interest in unionism. Increasing attention is now being paid to the difficulties placed in the path of women seeking leadership positions in male-dominated organizations. For example, the majority of women full-time officers surveyed by Heery and Kelly (1989) reported that they had been discriminated against both by lay members and by fellow male full-time officers. Indeed, 51 per cent complained of sexual harassment from fellow male officers, only marginally fewer than had complained about harassment from the male rank and file. Women's experience of the male culture of unions, as well as their location in the labour market, need to be more fully researched and considered in any explanation of women's unionization.

It is disappointing that most of the recent debate about union renewal in the UK fails to engage with even the traditional differences between women and men acknowledged by industrial relations scholars, let alone raising the issues that I have outlined here (Darlington 1994; Fairbrother 1996). Kelly's important book on mobilization and collectivism is a missed opportunity in this respect. He convincingly argues that academic industrial relations should 'redirect our attention away from bargaining structures and institutions and towards the social processes of industrial relations' (Kelly 1998: 38), thereby placing analyses of power and injustice in the workplace at the core. Yet his discussion of how individuals with a sense of injustice coalesce into a social movement takes no account of power inequalities between the sexes and the way in which such inequalities are increasingly perceived as illegitimate. The possibility that the labour movement might have something to learn from the women's movement is not even considered.

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5. Sex and skill: making a job of gender

The failure of many industrial relations academics to engage with explanations of the sexual division of labour may lie in their reluctance to acknowledge the role played by unions in institutionalizing women's subordinate position in the work-force. Standard accounts of the historical evolution of British trade unions seldom included the less than glorious record of union efforts on behalf of women (Lane 1974). There has been an unwillingness, when lauding unions as the collective voice of democratic participation at work, to recognize that they have functioned to represent sectional interests, often at the expense of their female members. The historical exclusion of women from some areas of work was not simply the result of management preferences but was actively pursued by male trade unionists (Walby 1983).[4] Craft workers, typically seen as the defenders of working-class interests in disputes over technical change, resisted the entry of women to skilled technical jobs in order to protect their own conditions.

Extensive feminist research has demonstrated that the craft system created the unskilled worker, and that this process of differentiation between kinds of worker involved both technological and ideological elements (Bradley 1989; Milkman 1987). Cockburn's (1983) study shows how printers perceived clashes over technological innovation not only as affecting the balance of power between capital and labour, but also as an aspect of gender power. The compositors' craft involved the construction of an identity both as skilled workers and as men. The two elements were inextricably linked. They experienced the move to computerized typesetting technologies as an affront to their masculinity and they organized against it as though their virility depended on it.

Analysis of the relationship between skilled work, technology and masculinity has provided a number of valuable insights. It has helped illuminate that control over the labour process does not operate independently of the gender of the workers who are being controlled. Both employers as employers and men as men have an interest in creating and sustaining occupational sex segregation. Gender is shown time and time again to be an important factor in shaping the organization of work that results from technological change (Cockburn 1983; MacKenzie and Wajcman 1999).

Further, men's traditional monopoly of technology has been identified as key to maintaining the definition of skilled work as men's work. The association between technology, masculinity and the very notion of what constitutes skilled work is still fundamental to the way in which the gender division of labour is being reproduced today. Machine-related skills and physical strength are basic measures of masculine status and self-esteem, and by implication the least technical jobs are suitable for women. The result is that machinery is literally designed by men with men in mind — the masculinity of the technology becomes embedded in the technology itself (see Wajcman 1991).

This is not to imply that the basis for distinctions of skill in women's and men's work is simply a technical matter. The gender stereotyping of jobs has

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remained stable even when the nature of work and the skills required have been radically transformed. Industrial relations writing is beginning to comprehend more fully that definitions of skill can have as much to do with ideological and social constructions as with technical competencies. Research on job evaluation schemes, where, for example, responsibility for money or equipment is rated more highly than responsibility for people, demonstrates the difficulties of producing a gender-neutral system (Liff 1995: 478; Steinberg 1992). The key point is that it is not only people who are gendered. Jobs themselves and the organizations in which they are located are gendered, too.

The gender-blindness of labour process theory was evident in the literature on flexible specialization (Pollert 1988) and can be found in recent discussions of the adoption of new production arrangements, such as just-in-time management and total quality control. As Jenson (1989) notes, enthusiasts of small groups, job rotation and employee involvement are often unaware of the differential impact that these new management techniques will have on women. It is men who are most likely to be found in occupations where management may become convinced of the high-quality strategy. Women, by contrast, are more likely to be found in occupations defined as low skilled where management continues to feel that competition on costs is the most viable option. This is confirmed by a recent cross-national comparison of the food industry, which found that the restructuring of work and skills increased the marginalization of women, reinforcing gender cleavage (Flecker *et al.* 1998; see also Wood 1986). The lower-quality upskilling experienced by women and their lower degree of involvement than men in performance management systems may well be leading to a gender gap in the quality of performance (White 1999). Pre-existing relationships of men and women to skilled labour and technology mediate the effects of new forms of work organization.

Indeed, it is seldom acknowledged in the literature that teamwork may exacerbate problems of difference. Teams often constitute themselves around notions of 'fitting in', making it difficult to include workers who are ethnically, racially or sexually different. 'Where the practices of Fordism de-emphasised differentiation among workers to some extent, uniting them by the moving line, stress on co-operation, consultation and planning can make it seem compelling to find "pals" with whom one feels comfortable' (Jenson 1989: 154). Accordingly, sexual difference may become a powerful limit to the development of mixed-sex work-groups. That men prefer the company of other men of a similar ilk is as true of managers as it is of employees, and it is to this institution that I now turn.

6. The gender relations of management

Up to this point I have stressed the role of unions in the systematic undervaluing of women's work and women's skills. This is clearly only part

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of the story. Employers' perceptions of the suitability of women and men for different types of work are even more influential. Managers, who design jobs and do the hiring, make an initial determination about whether a job is a 'woman's' or 'man's'. Differential recruitment and promotion practices are common, grounded in assumptions about whether a job is best filled by a man or woman (Collinson *et al.* 1990; Curran 1988). Informal and implicit criteria of acceptability are extensively used in the selection process, with behavioural and social skills being judged by individual recruiting managers.

The dominant stereotype of managerial work itself is suffused with masculine images. Success means being lean, mean, aggressive and competitive with tough, forceful leaders. In my study of senior managers (Wajcman 1998), interviewees cited visibility together with networks and acceptability as the most crucial factors in their career success. The gendered dimensions of these criteria were clear, not only in the literal existence of the old boy network, but also more subtly in the difficulties women had in making the 'right impact'. Familiar clichés that describe women as 'pushy' while men 'show initiative' indicate that the assessment and reward of ability and performance of women managers continues to be seen through a gendered lens.

Industrial relations research hitherto has paid insufficient attention to the informal cultural practices of organizations. A gendered analysis of these dynamics helps to understand the persistence of sex discrimination in employment, despite a framework of legal equality and widespread commitment to equal opportunities. Unravelling the fabric of male behaviour including men's resistance to sex equality goes some way to accounting for the difficulties in putting equal opportunity policies into practice. As Dickens (1994: 228) argues, 'there is a template for employment shaped around the typical circumstances of white, able-bodied men, within organizations where the culture, norms, values, notions of merit, formal and informal structures all reflect their attributes, needs, work and life patterns.'

There is a growing literature, from sociologists, management and organization theorists, that argues that gender relations are constitutive of the structure and practices of organizations and that this is key to understanding how men define and dominate organizations (Acker 1990; Hearn and Parkin 1987; Savage and Witz 1992). Gendered processes operate on many institutional levels, from the open and explicit to more discrete forms that are submerged in organizational decisions, even those that appear to have nothing to do with gender. They include the way men's influence is embedded in rules and procedures, in formal job definitions, and in functional roles as well as in everyday interactions. Through such cultural representations and meanings, people build their understandings of the gendered structure of work and opportunities. Organizations are one area in which images of masculinity and femininity and subjective gender identities are made and remade.

Questions of sexuality and the body at work have been relatively unexplored in the study of employment relations. Sexualized social relations, including sexual harassment, sexual banter and heterosexual flirtation, are

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a normal rather than exceptional part of the functioning of hierarchical organizations. For example, Hearn and Parkin (1987) have pointed to the ways in which male managers use sexuality, harassment, joking and abuse as routine means of maintaining authority. Men sexualize and objectify women in order to maintain women's subordination within organizations. Their use of women as sexual currency stresses the solidarity of men as well as men's difference from women.

The shift from manufacturing to service sector employment has lent some urgency to these debates. It has become fashionable to argue that service or 'front-line' work changes the very nature of work because the quality of the service provision is so intimately related to the personal qualities and social skills of the service providers (Urry 1990; Du Gay 1996). Although claims for the uniqueness of this sector are rather exaggerated, a growing number of these jobs require the supposedly feminine qualities of serving and caring. These new forms of labour have been variously theorized as 'emotional labour' (Hochschild 1983), 'sexual labour' (Adkins 1995) and 'aesthetic labour' or 'body work' (Tyler and Abbott 1998). Indeed, case studies such as those by Casey (1995), Jackall (1988) and Kunda (1992) indicate that self-presentation and interpersonal skills have become central to the job performance of managers and professionals in post-bureaucratic organizations. However, these authors do not explore the extent to which their male subjects are constrained by hegemonic masculinities that require them to behave within predetermined parameters.

The feminization of service work has specific implications for women because their physical appearance and 'personality' are increasingly an implicit part of the employment contract. An illustration is the requirement imposed on female, but not male, flight attendants to weigh in periodically during routine grooming checks in order to maintain a strict weight–height ratio (Tyler and Abbott 1998). The enforcement of weight control by the airline industry leads to 'enforced' dieting in pursuit of the thin ideal body. This aesthetic labour or body work, like emotional and sexual labour, is an integral part of the 'effort bargain' (see Forrest 1998). Yet it is not recognized or remunerated, because it is seen as what women are rather than what women do. Our analysis of the employment relationship can only be strengthened by reflecting more extensively on culture, gender identity and sexuality in organizations. In particular, those interested in the gender equality implications of increasingly complex selection and appraisal techniques and performance-related pay need to be more sensitive to the gender bias inherent in judgements about the way jobs are performed (Rubery 1995; Dickens 1998).

7. The sexual contract

Just as women's gender work on the job is outside the normal scope of inquiry of industrial relations, so too is women's daily unpaid work within the household.[5] Although it is now commonplace to note that we cannot

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understand the position of women and men in the labour market, nor their experience of work, without considering the salience of family life, few studies of employment actually do this even outside industrial relations. Most studies still show little consciousness of life 'beyond the factory gates'. While the resilience of occupational segregation and the gender pay gap receive considerable attention, the fact that the sex segregation of domestic labour has hardly altered is rarely mentioned in this context.

There has been much discussion about the European Working Time Directive and the need to change Britain's long hours culture (Hall and Sisson 1997). However, the focus is usually on shortening the working week rather than the working day. This is a denial of women's experience in a number of ways. Most obviously, it denies the fact that most women work part-time, and that many may wish to work longer hours. Further, the fact that it is women in full-time employment who work the longest hours because of the unpaid household work they do is seldom recognized. For women and men, a reduction in the length of the working day is what is needed to accommodate family and domestic responsibilities. Research has repeatedly confirmed that, for all men's protestation about aspiring to an egalitarian marital partnership, on average, wives still do approximately two-thirds of unpaid domestic work (Layte 1999: 36).

Feminist theory has provided a more thoroughgoing critique of the divide between work and home, and the public and the private, by arguing that the capitalist labour market is itself fundamentally structured by patriarchal relations within the family (Pateman 1988). Indeed, full-time work has become the norm only because it developed around male patterns of work and behaviour. Like the employment contract itself, industrial relations presupposes the 'sexual contract' and still assumes that the standard worker is male. Men and women do not enter the labour market on the same terms. Women enter the workplace defined as family-oriented persons, with their wage labour power diminished by domestic work, whereas when men enter the workplace they are stripped of any domestic identity. Men are in a privileged position to contract out their labour power because the marriage contract frees them from domestic responsibility. Indeed, the employment contract presupposes this sexual contract.

The notion of the sexual contract applies in two senses. First, in the literal sense, it refers to the empirical situation whereby becoming and functioning as an employee or a worker requires domestic servicing, or, to put it simply, a wife. The managerial and professional career is a particularly telling example of the dependence of men upon their wives' domestic labour because it requires long hours, geographical mobility, considerable preparation for public participation and high standards within the home. Indeed, managers with working wives earn less than their counterparts with non-working wives (Hotchkiss and Moore 1999). The long and unpredictable hours, shift work and intense physical demands imposed by employers on working-class men also rely on the fact that someone else is taking care of their family's physical and emotional needs.

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More metaphorically, the notion of the sexual contract refers to the ways in which it is a premiss built into the fabric of the labour market itself. The social construction of 'jobs' already has within it the assumption that workers will be men and that these men will have wives to take care of their daily needs. Whatever women do to offload their domestic work, they are still defined in domesticity in a way that men are not. What is problematized at work is *women's* relation to the domestic sphere. 'This is what women *are* to most men (and to most women): people who have domestic ties' (Cockburn 1991: 76). Crucially, the stigma of motherhood affects all women, whether or not they are married and whether or not they have children. As referred to earlier, employers' perceptions of employees' domestic circumstances affect recruitment and promotion practices. It is no accident that much of women's paid work mirrors their domestic roles.

Moreover, part-time jobs, with wages below adult subsistence, are explicitly designed around the notion that women's wages are a supplement to the family income. Although the male-breadwinner household is now in the minority, the concept of the family wage lingers on in social policy. Feminists have long argued that the welfare state reflects and entrenches gender roles and the division of women's lives into public and private spheres (see Lewis 1992; O'Connor *et al.* 1999). Since the 1970s there has been a gradual shift from the traditional breadwinner model of welfare state provision to a gender-neutral model in which both men and women are encouraged to form enduring attachments to the labour force, and which confers benefit entitlements on an individual basis. This transformation is by no means complete, so that policy assumptions based on the principle of a male breadwinner family coexist with policies that recognize gender equality and individual social rights. The point is that the state plays a key role in establishing norms in employment and wages policy. Studies of paid work need to be attuned to the gendered dimensions of these social policy regimes.

8. Conclusion

Gender is now a significant if understudied theme in the field of British industrial relations. However, there has been a tendency to conflate studies of women with gender analysis. A gender analysis of industrial relations is not simply about adding 'women's issues' to the list of research topics, or noting the impact of industrial relations systems on women. Rather, it involves examining the gendered character of work for men and women, as well as the major institutions involved. Although sex segregation in the labour market is now a mainstream topic in industrial relations, analyses of this phenomenon have tended to be descriptive rather than explanatory. There has been increasing consciousness of the tendency to treat workers as male, but without a deeper understanding of the way power inequalities between men and women shape employment relations. As a result, the

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gender effects of processes internal to the labour market have been neglected. Such an analysis would add to our understanding not only of the character of women's employment, but also of men's.

It is argued here that management, trade unions and the state are institutions which contribute to the gendering process. Institutionalized sex discrimination takes place both at the level of the formal structure of organizations and at the more subtle cultural level. Organizations are fundamentally constituted by cultures, and the informal norms and everyday cultural practices of organizations are rarely gender-neutral. This insight applies equally to trade unions and management conceived of as organizations. We need to be sensitive to the way organizations embody the taken-for-granted habits and customs of men in order to understand how women can experience them as a foreign territory. Whereas masculine identity has traditionally been confirmed at work, femininity has been less so. For this reason, genuine equality of opportunity requires more than formal policies.

More profoundly, the argument here is that the workplace and the labour market cannot be understood in isolation from the private sphere of the household and the labour of social reproduction that goes on there. It has long been argued within feminist theory that a dual-systems theory that treats capitalism and patriarchy as separate systems is inadequate. The very nature of jobs and the organization of the labour market are intimately tied to the nature of gender relations within the family. In other words, the employment contract presupposes the sexual contract. The point is that a gender analysis is as relevant to the design of male full-time jobs as it is to female part-time jobs. As Beechey and Perkins (1987: 146) confirmed in their research, 'there is nothing inherent in the nature of particular jobs which makes them full time or part time. They have been constructed as such, and such constructions are closely related to gender.' Gender is an integral part of industrial relations analysis, whether one is considering the acquisition of skills and access to employment, manufacturing *v.* services, the nature of collective bargaining, the impact of technology on the restructuring of work and skills, the links between production and consumption (whether it be cars or washing machines), how social policy interacts with employment and wages policy, debates about working time or prospects for union renewal.

Moreover, a feminist perspective is a useful one from which to contemplate how industrial relations as a field is conceptualized. Male priorities and privilege have shaped the research agenda. The iconic status of the automobile worker bears witness to this. Industrial relations needs to follow the lead of the trade union movement which has realized, if belatedly, that it marginalizes women at its peril. The changing realities of the workplace and industrial life lend urgency to this task. Developments along the lines I advocate are taking place. Yet there are disturbing signs that enthusiasts of the new industrial relations, with its emphasis on new production arrangements and skill enhancement, may be reproducing the gender-blindness of earlier studies. An approach that keeps both women and men in

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view, and pays sufficient attention to the nature and operation of masculinized institutions, will enrich future industrial relations research.

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Notes

1. For the purposes of this review, I have chosen to focus on 'core' industrial relations publications rather than encompassing, for example, the field of human resource management. See Dickens (1998) for a discussion of the gender-blindness of HRM. Also, I acknowledge that industrial relations scholars do contribute to publications such as the sociology journal *Work, Employment and Society*, within which gender is now accepted as an essential analytical category.
2. Edwards and Gilman (1999) provide a good example of how a gender analysis can enhance our understanding of the impact of the National Minimum Wage.
3. This in no way diminishes the importance of collective bargaining for gender equality, as evidenced by the fact that women who are represented by a union enjoy better terms and conditions than those who are not (Booth 1995; Colling and Dickens 1998: 393–4).
4. For example, the deployment of women during wartime to perform many jobs for which they had previously been deemed unsuitable, and their subsequent removal, was often facilitated by trade union agreements (Summerfield 1989; Glucksmann 1990).
5. I presume that one no longer has to justify the treatment of housework as 'real' work, as even the UN regularly estimates its worth of GNP (see Goldschmidt-Clermont and Pagnossin-Aligisakis 1995). For discussion of different forms of work see also Moore (1995).

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