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## MEETINGS AND INTERSECTIONS

### Organizational Theory Encounters Feminist Theorising

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**Synopsis**—The stimulus for the thoughts expressed in this article was an article published in 1992 by Marta Calás and Linda Smircich entitled "Re-writing Gender in Organizational Theorising: Directions From Feminist Perspectives" in which they use a feminist poststructuralist perspective to examine the way in which gender is "written" into organizational theory. This article, however, is not concerned with issues of deconstruction and the rewriting of organizational discourse, but with consideration of how organizational theory and feminist theory might meet, intersect, and enrich each other.

The stimulus for the thoughts expressed in this article was an article, published in 1992, by Marta Calás and Linda Smircich entitled "Re-writing Gender in Organizational Theorising: Directions From Feminist Perspectives" in which they use a feminist poststructuralist perspective to examine the way in which gender is "written" into organizational theory.

This article is guided by and follows much of the argument presented in the Calás and Smircich article, but it is not concerned, as that article was, with issues of deconstruction and the rewriting of organizational discourse, but with consideration of how organizational theory and feminist theory might meet, intersect, and enrich each other.

For the purposes of the article, the base assumptions of feminist theorising are simplified into the broad statement that the existence of male dominance (patriarchy/phallocracy) is taken as read, and that a diminution, if not a removal, of this domination is desired and is being worked toward. And the feminist viewpoint on sex and gender is generalised into the

view of sex as a matter of biology and gender as a socially constructed category.

There is now a quantity of theorising about gender issues in organizations which has been published under the umbrella of Women's Studies, and likewise, there is a variety of theorising in the organizational literature concerned with gender and other feminist issues. The problem is that neither of these two bodies of theorising appears to take much note of the other.

My concern in this article is to consider the possibility of a meeting and intersection. In the first section, I cover some of the ideas that feminism puts forward about organizational analysis. In the second, I consider what organizational theorising has said about feminist issues. And in the final section, I consider the implications and consequences of the meetings and intersections of the two sets of theory.

What I do not undertake in this article is a discussion of the ways that women organise and manage, and whether these are similar to, or different from, the ways that men operate in organizations. I do, however, put forward the view that organizational theorising is not neutral but is male-gendered, and consider what the consequences might be if a feminist orientation were incorporated. I have deliberately not said "if such an orientation were added,"

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because it is evident that such feminist-inclined areas do already exist in organizational theory — but I suggest that where feminist perspectives do exist, they are added on to theory rather than incorporated or embedded within it.

### WHAT FEMINISM HAS SAID ABOUT ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

In brief, not all that much. In 1981, in the ground-breaking book edited by Dale Spender, *Men's Studies Modified*, the impact of feminism on a number of academic disciplines was considered. A variety of disciplines was discussed — for example, literary criticism, political science, history, and law, among others. The closest that the book reached to organizational theorising was a chapter on economics.

Although Mary Gergen could still edit *Feminist Thought and the Structure of Knowledge* in 1988, include chapters on natural science, anthropology, social psychology and history — and still ignore organizational analysis — things have moved on during the 1980s and into the 1990s.

The area of feminist ideas which has had the most impact on organizational analysis is that of gender. Gender issues have been included in organizational theorising, but a feminist view would suggest that these issues tend to be underrepresented and that they are debated and theorised about in an inadequate and incomplete manner. The generalisation here is that like real women in real organizations, gender issues in organizational theorising tend to be marginalised, trivialised, or misrepresented.

As an indication of such underrepresentation, it is interesting to note that many of the articles which deal with a feminist approach to organizational analysis exist as unpublished manuscripts or as conference papers, rather than as journal publications or chapters in books, which makes it more difficult for those interested in the topic to acquire them. For example, cited by Calás and Smircich, see Acker, 1987; Alvesson & Billing, undated; Balsamo, 1985; Calás & Jacques, 1988; Donelson, Van Sell, & Goehle, 1985; Jacobsen & Jacques, 1989; Smircich, 1985. This situation is being remedied, albeit slowly.

When the concept of gender is present in organizational analysis, it tends to be treated as another variable among the other variables of relevance. For a feminist analysis, this is not

good enough. Feminist scholars have revealed the problematics around “knowing” as a gendered sphere of action and have reexamined the production of knowledge in their disciplines in order to change the balance from “the woman question in knowledge” to “the knowledge question in feminism” (Harding, 1986). Theories, once they are accepted as knowledge, guide researchers and organizational members in their understanding of organizations. It is thus important that such theories are as little biased and misrepresentative as possible.

The production of knowledge in academic disciplines has been an area of significance for feminist scholars. Attention has been given to such concerns as women's absence from canons of knowledge producers and the extent to which the historical underrepresentation of women as scholars may have biased the choice of research problems, the design of research projects, and the interpretation of results (Calás and Smircich, 1992). Assuredly, the establishing of Women's Studies departments and programmes has provided a context for much feminist scholarship over the past 20 years. In practice, faculty members teaching feminist theory tend to hold positions in disciplinary departments such as sociology or history and to split their time between what might be called their discipline of origin and their Women's Studies courses. This contributes to the fact that much feminist research and scholarship is often multidisciplinary in nature.

In the main, the contribution of feminism to organizational analysis can be described as forming two broad strands:

1. the strand which is well articulated and strongly expressed, concerning the values in research which privilege the male viewpoint, and
2. the perspective which considers that the production of knowledge itself is restricted and biased by the way that male-centred modes of thought are considered to be gender-neutral.

I return to these issues in the final section of the article.

It is an undeniable fact of history that where the scholarly or the academic/scientific community is concerned, women have tended to be marginalised or excluded. One has only to consider how long it took for the Universities of Oxford or Cambridge to confer degrees on

women after they were, reluctantly, allowed to become students there. Such marginalisation and exclusion must inevitably affect any scholarly project. The questions that are asked, the subject of inquiry, the methodology, and the interpretation of results are all affected by the gender of the scholar, because that gender is the result of social conditioning and conditions.

Feminist theorising insists that there are alternative ways of developing meaningful knowledge about the world and that the language and process of scholarly activity, the goals, what counts as truth, the techniques, and the theoretical basis all reflect gender biases in the production of knowledge (Lehman, 1992).

As a generalisation (which is itself open to criticism as a form of stereotyping), the shaping of knowledge into a form which is rigorous, controllable, and influential has been, in the main, the work of male scholars and those female scholars who have been coopted into the world of masculine discourse. It is the feminist scholarly agenda which is attempting to replace this mode with inclusionary processes, embracing such "soft" areas as experience and context. It is suggested that the inclusion within any scholarly project of the variety of interests, biases, perspectives, and needs of re-searcher and research subject/object would turn scholarship away from the passive or manipulative, freeing it to become active and dynamic. This is not an agenda which requires the "feminisation" of scholarship, in the sense of weakening its scholarly rigour, but rather a plan to strengthen scholarly possibilities by including that which has tended to be left out.

But, as Lehman (1992, p. 48) acknowledges

The nature of the feminist critique, which recognizes and problematises the social constitution of knowledge, would suggest that any alternatives and perspectives would themselves be subject to challenges, scrutiny and transformation.

It is acknowledged that, for organisational theory, this process of interrogation and revision has begun, as can be seen, for example, in the book edited by Coontz and Henderson (1986) concerning the origins of gender and class in the areas of work and property; French (1986) on women, men, and morals; Haraway (1989) on the issues of gender, race, and nature

in modern science; and Jagger (1983) on feminist politics and "human nature."

### WHAT ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS HAS SAID ABOUT FEMINISM

Once again, not much, and that which has been said tends to be critical in the negative sense of the word. From their beginnings in the early part of this century, organizational theory and research have been heavily weighted toward the study of male society. Studies of managerial and professional workers tend to focus on men, and not only because men are usually in positions of power and leadership — in those studies which focus on the lower participants of organizations, the samples studied are also mainly male.

An example of this male bias is easily seen in studies of the concept of leadership. This is a large and ongoing area of organizational theorising which consists of three broad subsections: the traits theories, which place emphasis on the personal characteristics possessed by leaders (leadership is inborn and is what one is); the situation theories, which emphasise that leadership is dependent on the situations which create or require leaders (leadership is what one can be trained to do and is what one does); and the function theories, which concentrate on ways or styles of leadership (leadership is how one leads).

It is a truism that when researchers choose certain issues as important to research and describe, what they choose to investigate is that which is seen as being "worthwhile" or "interesting" or "valuable," and the methods chosen to investigate these issues reveal how researchers see the subject they are investigating. The underlying and implicit assumption that leadership in organizations is really a male activity is revealed, particularly in the traits theories of leadership where the personality of the born leader is exhibited in traits such as energy, aggressiveness, enthusiasm, initiative, self-confidence, with the addition of some, shall we say "softer" traits, such as adaptability, tact, and appearance (Mullins, 1993).

The functions approach to leadership considers leadership styles, and one line of research splits these into three broad areas: Authoritarian (or Autocratic), Democratic, and Laissez-Faire. Even here, there is an unvoiced assumption

about the gender of those people who are comfortable leading with an authoritarian style.

Gender is taken into account in organizational theorising in a number of different ways. For instance, it has been done in a way that has limited its impact to nonorganizational considerations (Mills, 1992). Mills cites an early piece of research by Blauner (1967) concerning alienation. Male workers' statements about their dissatisfaction were accepted as valid expressions of such alienation at work, while women's job dissatisfaction was explained by reference to their family commitments.

Another way in which organizational theorising has considered gender has been concerned with what can be labelled women-in-management (e.g., see Goffee & Scase, 1985; Grant, 1988; Marshall, 1984, 1986, 1992; Stead, 1985). This is a relatively new area for organizational theory, because the presence of women in management in any significant numbers is a recent phenomenon. It would seem, however, that until the arrival of women into previously male-dominated professions, organizational theorists operated as though there were no gender in management. As in other areas of academic theorising, the male presence is the standard, the norm, and the female presence is at best marginalised and at worst, ignored.

### THE IMPLICATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES OF THESE MEETINGS AND INTERSECTIONS

It is at this point, therefore, that the level of generality on which this article is based needs some justification. The view which permeates the article is that it is not only possible for organizational theorising and feminist theorising to meet and intersect, but that this is desirable. What has clearly been ignored is the question of which particular aspect of organizational and feminist theorising is to be given priority.

Where feminist-oriented organizational theorising is concerned, the issue is of sufficient importance not to be sidetracked into evaluations of specific subsectors of theory, but should be as all-embracing as possible. A reason for this all-comers-welcome approach is demonstrated by David Moore (1991, p. 2) where he states that 3,460 articles were published in the four leading accounting journals

between 1971 and 1990, and not one of these articles included the terms "feminist" or "feminism" in the title or the abstract. This is enough to cause one to embrace any theorising at all that labels itself, or is labelled, as feminist, and is likely to dampen any optimism that feminism and organizational theory might already be talking constructively to one another.

Like all academic disciplines, organizational analysis uses a specialised language of expertise, and like most academic disciplines, it tends to be elitist and monopolised by men. Calás and Smircich (1992, p. 235) provide suggestions as to how one could elicit the degree to which organizational theorising is male-gendered. Using their analysis, in order for organizational theorising to meet with feminist theorising and for these two theoretical perspectives to intersect, it would seem that two initial and parallel steps are necessary.

First, it would be beneficial to correct the record, by which I mean that explicit attempts need to be made to expose the full extent of women's absence as subjects of inquiry and, more importantly perhaps, as the authors of knowledge, and then, to add and, more importantly, to incorporate women's contributions to the field.

Second, having dealt with the past, it is necessary to expose and correct for gender bias in current knowledge. Informed by Calás and Smircich's (1992) opinion concerning the way to attempt this, I suggest that this would indicate a fivefold process:

1. The first requirement is to retrace the conceptual history of the field of organizational analysis to assess the consequences of the underrepresentation of women, in terms of the loss of benefits to knowledge and to our society.
2. At the same time, it is necessary to review the important texts, in search of misogyny or sexism, because these are destructive to the scholastic endeavour.
3. There is also the need to assess the consequences of the feminist assertion that women's viewpoints are not sufficiently solicited in research and that their viewpoints are absent.
4. There is a need to clarify the extent to which the concepts through which we produce knowledge are male-gendered.

5. Finally, it is essential to reconsider the underlying values that guide the interpretation of data.

This agenda is already being addressed. Certainly, the essential process of reconsideration has begun in organisational theory. To present only two of several recent examples: Hearn and Burrell (1989) have written about the "male genderedness" of organizational theorising, and Calás and Smircich (1989) have questioned the values that are represented in the choice of research questions and modes of analysis.

But what is required is more than merely adding women to organizational theorising as a separate parallel field, which is what much of the women-in-management research tends to do.

What is at issue here is the dynamic between "knowledge" and "ways of doing knowledge," in order to reflect and alter existing gender relations and patriarchal models. Thus, adopting a feminist stance in organizational theorising means more than adding a feminist paradigm to the existing multiplicity of paradigms.

Scholarly discourse tends to be what Mulkay (1985, p. 254) has termed

masculine discourse, with each speaker insisting on the exclusive validity of *his* position, *his* interests and *his* interpretation. (original emphasis)

The discourse which feminist scholars advocate is what Mulkay goes on to describe as

more collaborative, less exclusive, more able to allow for interpretative diversity, less committed to maintaining analytical privilege.

The difficulty appears to be that these issues are inextricably caught up in the ramifications of scientific discourse, which is fundamentally a discourse based on power and domination over nature. Scientific discourse tends to be the benchmark against which other scholarly discourses are compared. When such a discourse is extended into the social realm, it tends to become the basis for the exercise of social (in this instance, academic) power. And in our society, the holders of such power tend to be men, who are unwilling to share it, let alone — as some varieties of feminism would

suggest — abandon it and adopt other modes of being.

What appears to be ignored in "masculine discourse," with its emphasis on rationality and intellectual independence, is that all research is collaborative. The references and footnotes in any academic paper reveal how dependent scholars are on the work of others. Whether we build on, amend, or oppose it, the work of predecessors and contemporaries provides the indispensable frame within which we pursue knowledge, and write or talk about it.

There is a sense in which feminist theorists, with their both/and rather than either/or philosophy, are open to this truth. As stated earlier, feminist theory has contributed two significant insights to academic disciplines: the uncovering of the previously hidden values in scholarly work which privilege the male viewpoint, and the disclosing of the many ways in which the production of knowledge is not gender-neutral, but male-centred.

One of the weaknesses of this article lies in its inability to predict the consequences of any serious encounter between feminism and organizational analysis. This is because there are still unanswered (but not unanswerable) questions to be dealt with. In any meeting between the two, would feminism be seeking irrevocably to alter organizational theory from the outside, or would feminism attempt to subvert it from the inside? Is it better to participate in exclusionary practices with the intention of changing them, or to stay outside the arena and attempt to subvert them from there?

Assuredly, feminist theorising has the capacity to rewrite organizational theory's texts, review its concepts, and to reassess its contributions to an understanding of social life, and this process has already begun.

At the core of the feminist approach is the insistence on the inclusion of women in all social and intellectual pursuits. Thus, the question is not whether feminist theorising and organizational theory should meet and attempt to come to terms with one another, but how this meeting might benefit both areas of knowledge.

This brings forward the issue of accountability and the problem of which body of knowledge is to be accountable to the other. When one considers feminism from the viewpoint of liberal humanism (Lehman, 1988), there are two ways forward. In the one, organizational analysis becomes the object toward which

feminist theory turns. In this case, organizational theorising becomes the focus of an examination and critique, which comes from outside of itself. Alternatively, organizational theorising maintains its "shape" and viewpoint, and feminist theorising is assimilated into organizational theory, changing its nature in the process.

This uncertainty about accountability is evident in the women-in-management literature, which has investigated the dilemma confronting the woman manager. She can choose to seek admission into the organization by means of assimilation. If she does this, the organization is not disrupted and retains its structure and functions as they were before she arrived. Or she can attempt to transform the practices of the organization, a more personally dangerous activity. There is the other hazard that if she seeks assimilation into the norms and practices of her organization, she might well begin to participate in its already-established exclusionary and oppressive features, thereby dooming those women who come after to undertake the struggle for acceptance anew.

If then, we view organizational, as well as feminist, theorising as bodies of knowledge and as discursive fields, we can consider that

what words mean is determined by the history of their use, and that history is suspect from a feminist perspective. (Shearer & Arrington, 1993, p. 256)

The implications for those who study organizations include the requirement to pay genuine attention, rather than lip service, not only to the words used to describe such issues as the relationship between gender and power, of maleness and management, and of the construction of sexuality within organizations, but also to their reality. It is obvious that the mere fact of accepting a job outside the home does not liberate a woman or begin to make her equal with men. Rather it usually means coping with two jobs with her position in the work organization being little different from her position in the home (Hearn & Parkin, 1992). It is possible that if these issues were securely on the research agenda, this would cause a blurring of the boundaries between the subjects and objects of research, the research method chosen, and the problems of a personal, political, and ethical nature that such research would entail.

The woman who has succeeded in an organization need not necessarily be a feminist. Research undertaken by a woman does not automatically have a feminist perspective. A feminist view of organization is not necessarily a separate paradigm, but could instead be an overview of male organizational power.

The consequences of reviewing and reassessing organizational theory, together with a rethinking of our grounds for judging the value and accuracy of organizational theorising in the light of feminist theory, as Calás and Smircich suggest, are likely to be that presentations of organizational theorising will become more diverse, and will include topics of more concern to women — if not the happiest of futures, a happier one than our present situation might lead us to expect.

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