

Gender and ideology in employment interactions

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ABSTRACT

This paper is presented as a contribution to a less masculine conceptualisation of industrial relations systems. 'Gender' as applied to an individual's attribute of masculinity or femininity is related to 'gender relations' as exemplified in patriarchal social values. A review of industrial relations writing on ideology and theory leads to an exploration of dominant social values and processes of state intervention. A re-casting of industrial relations systems theory on the basis of the feminist and radical critique is then attempted in which a non-linear system model (the 'spherix') relates individual employment outcomes to 'binding ideology'.

Introduction

This paper builds on the paper 'Key Factors in Industrial Relations Outcomes' (Ostenfeld, 2003). There a cubic matrix was suggested as an alternative way of conceptualising industrial relations systems. Environmental contexts were ascribed to the various axes of the matrix. Subsequent discussion focussed on the place of gender in the matrix. Following from that discussion, this paper considers the feminist (and radical) critiques of the systems model in an attempt to contribute to a less masculine conceptualisation of industrial relations systems. The spherical conception of the matrix (herein described as a 'spherix') that emerges from this process represents an attempt to integrate social realism, a critical perspective and political economy, as discussed by Hyman (1994:171) and Godard (1994:3), with the structural and behavioural accounts of social relations. This integration is attempted through locating industrial relations interactors within persistent social contexts such as patriarchy and capitalism. Through highlighting value systems such as patriarchal gender relations the bargaining and other structures that are superficially constitutive of industrial relations may offer deeper explanation of employment outcomes.

Gender is envisaged to be multi-dimensional within the proposed spherix. First, 'gender' in part describes the attribute of 'masculinity' and 'femininity', most usually ascribed, respectively, to men and women. In general terms the outcomes for most men and some (masculine) women in the terms of the employment contract may be contrasted with the outcomes of most women and some (feminine) men. It is proposed to plot the location of interactors in the spherix in terms of these employment outcomes. Second, 'gender relations' pervade the employment interactions spherix, constituting a part of the 'ideology' or 'values' that condition, or act as 'intervening variables' (Shalev, cited in Hyman, 1994:177) providing the context for employment interactions. Edwards expresses this in terms of 'rules of employment shaped by legal, political, economic, social and historical context', a context in which the various elements 'do not exert direct influence on behaviour' (1995:5). Godard calls such social institutions 'first order' explanations, part of the foundations for theoretical analysis (1994:17). He sees such 'theoretical realism' as an extension of social action analysis (1994:14), with the task of critical theory to go further in deconstructing the role of social institutions and facilitate 'emancipation' (Godard, 1994:17).

Re-conceptualising industrial relations systems

'Key Factors in Industrial Relations Outcomes' outlines a re-conceptualisation to multiple dimensions of the two-dimensional flow-charts that, generally, list the actors, processes and rules outcomes of industrial relations systems theory. The architecture of the 'matrix' is provided by the environmental contexts described by Dunlop (1958). The dynamism of the matrix can be attributed to Dabscheck's *General Theory* (1994), later dubbed the 'orbital theory' (Michelson and Westcott, 2001).

Dabscheck modifies Dunlop's original conception of an industrial relations system in two important ways. First, Dunlop's three 'actors' are replaced by 'n' 'interactors'. Second, the system is made dynamic through the interplay between interactors in their quest for authority. This interplay moves beyond the quest for 'survival' found in the Dunlop system to a quest for 'authority'. It was proposed in 'Key Factors in Industrial Relations Outcomes' that the outcomes of the behaviour of the interactors could be plotted on the matrix as they respond to and shape their environmental contexts as set out in the structure of the matrix. If system outcomes were evaluated in terms of, for example, actual wages and employment conditions, then it is those outcomes that would be plotted on the matrix.

The original proposition of a matrix of outcomes came from a case study of bargaining in Victoria involving the United Firefighters' Union (Ostenfeld and Lewer, 2003). A simple crossed-line (two-factor) diagram was used to illustrate the dynamic nature of the interplay between environmental and organisational factors in the determination of employment interaction outcomes as the Australian regulatory framework decentralised. This matrix was developed into a three-dimensional cube as key structural factors determining varying employment interaction outcomes were considered (Ostenfeld, 2002, 2003).

The cubic-box shape of the matrix as it was illustrated in these papers has evolved to a spherical notion of the matrix, thence the 'spherix'. This has helped to locate the dynamic force of the structural variables of the matrix through using the centre of the spherix as a reference point. The structural variables exert either beneficial or detrimental effects in their interplay with system interactors, acting thus either as centripetal or centrifugal forces as the case may be.

If the 'authority' motivation of interactor behaviour may be conceptualised as a motivation to move closer to the locus of power in a masculinist employment interaction spherix, then beneficent environmental and organisational factors will act in such centripetal terms, facilitating the movement of the interactors towards the centre. Maleficent factors will act in centrifugal terms, as an outward driving force, impeding the movement of the interactors towards the centre. Herein lies a critical difference between the spherix as it has evolved and the original cubic, or 'condo' matrix. The 'locus of power' was originally ascribed to an axis, and conceived in terms of the State. However the radical and feminist critiques of industrial relations systems theory show that institutional structures, including the State, reflect and nurture dominant forces in society. Factors such as capital, in capitalist societies, and masculinity, in masculinist societies, are such dominant forces. The 'locus of power' is not an axis, but can be conceptualised as the centre of the spherix, and is socially constructed. Institutions such as the State reflect and reconstruct, through subjectivity, what is socially ascribed as 'model' – e.g., white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant and heterosexual masculinity.

Pluralist commentaries and radical and feminist critiques of IR Systems

Academics have been calling for a re-casting of industrial relations theory from all sides. From within the pluralist tradition, for example, Kochan argues that 'we need to take a more holistic approach to the study of work and put its relationships to other institutions in society, and particularly the relationship between work and family life, at the centre of our analysis'. Moving from power relations to the dynamic nature of actor organisation, Kochan suggests that 'intermediary institutions, given their increased importance, may need to be considered as one of the 'key actors' in future industrial relations theories' (2000:708). Kaufman, elsewhere, is cited as claiming that the lack of an integrating theory in Industrial Relations is one of four reasons for the 'hollowing out' of Industrial Relations in North America (Edwards, 1995:39). Edwards is himself more positive with regard to Britain, where a 'critical and analytical perspective on management', combined with the use of the case-study method, enabled the 'British research tradition ... to respond to the HRM challenge' (1995:41).

British Industrial Relations academics such as Edwards retain conflict at the centre of analysis and suggest that 'the analytical task ... is to show how different forms of workplace regime organise conflict and cooperation in different ways (1995:52). The traditional British (Oxford School) emphasis on bargaining structures is also retained: 'Studying how different regimes of labour regulation function at the point of production is a key part of the future research agenda' (Edwards, 1995:56). Power is highlighted as part of the system in such formulations, and in the

three-dimensional wheel offered by others to illustrate such a 'framework of employee relations analysis' (Blyton and Turnbull, 1998:33). Yet in such analysis there is limited articulation of the ways in which power dynamics in society play out in the employment relationship beyond the move from British corporatist voluntarism to market individualism.

The behavioural sciences appraisal of Industrial Relations is reviewed by Poole. He restates Bain and Clegg's submission that 'the weight to be attached to behavioural rather than structural variables is an empirical question' (1984:39). Bain and Clegg are further cited as suggesting that these behavioural variables may be incorporated into the overall conceptual ('Dunlop-Flanders') system (1984:39). In similar vein Poole contends that deficiencies in the 'treatment of the origins of conflict and change and also in terms of the deployment and understanding of such key concepts as power and ideology in the overall model' are 'by no means irredeemable' (1984:43). Dunlop saw power as an exogenous environmental context but he did countenance a variety of political systems and advocated the intellectual task of depicting the 'dynamic interaction between political power and labour-management-government relations' (Poole, 1984:43). This does cover the multiplicity of roles for, for example, trade unions operating in both industrial relations and political systems.

In terms of a 'binding ideology' or 'values for system maintenance', Poole cites Hyman, Margerison, and Laffer in suggesting that 'the nature of, and the forces shaping conflict should have a more prominent role in industrial relations research and theorising than is ever likely from the deployment of social system models (1984:44). The spherix, with its centripetal/centrifugal forces, however, is one way of incorporating these elements in social system models, as will be shown below. But first, a more detailed examination of the radical and feminist critiques needs to be undertaken to move beyond this critique of the systems model from within the pluralist tradition.

The 'system based assumptions that industrial relations can be separated from politics, or that there is a consensus support for collective bargaining' became 'much more suspect' to Palmer after the election of the Thatcher government in Britain in 1979 (Palmer, 1983:17). In reviewing perspectives on the employment relationship Palmer articulates a typology of value systems (Palmer, 1983:10-27) that is later used in Gardner and Palmer in their typology of 'processes of state intervention' (1997:153). Palmer (1983) reviews the unitary, liberal collectivist/systems, corporatist, liberal individualist/neo-laissez-faire, Marxist, and Weberian perspectives. Gardner and Palmer's (1997) typology retains six classifications: market individualism, liberal collectivism, corporatism, social corporatism, and bargained corporatism.

An industrial relations system is conditioned by processes of state intervention. In some political/ideological/value systems, employees are closer to the locus of power than in other systems. For example, as a result of the influence of Durkheim, 'corporatism has been more readily accepted on the continent than in the UK or USA' (Palmer, 1983:18). Employees are thus closer to the locus of power in Europe than in the UK or USA, where values, and hence processes of political intervention, have deep roots in liberal individualism. This conditioning by processes of state intervention might be expected to iterate a range of employment interaction outcomes, both organisationally and individually, depending on the mode of state intervention that is under analysis. The legal system, as part of the apparatus of the state, for example, supports masculinist capitalism through the nature of the employment relationship, including 'the authoritarian nature of the employment relation at law and the interest conflicts between capital and labour which underly this relation' (Godard, 1994:13, citing Bowles). To Marsden, industrial relations is the 'study of objectified ideologies or laws' (1982:247-248). To Jacoby, those in industrial relations see 'institutions as part of the stream: theoretically inseparable from it and, in many cases, functional to its continued movement. Social norms, customs, and laws form what Durkheim ... called the 'noncontractual relations' of the contract' (1988:26).

In addressing the 'problem of disorder' raised by Durkheim, Hyman and Brough (1975) are to the point: "the forced division of labour' might well be regarded as the normal situation within a capitalist society, for the inequalities which Durkheim castigates are integral to capitalist social relations By contrast, the proposals of industrial relations pluralists for a reconstruction of normative order without any alteration in the broader structure of inequality have profoundly repressive implications' (1975:176, emphasis in original).

It is in this context that Shalev compares the struggle between capital and labour with the struggle between plantation and homestead (1985:339), agreeing with Commons that 'everything that is done by capitalism is founded on what the state does for capitalism' (1985:349). It is this 'broader structure of inequality', related to the capitalist social relations of advanced industrialised economies, that is articulated by Palmer (1983), then Gardner and Palmer (1997) in terms of 'processes of state intervention'

Beyond Durkheim, Palmer's review of the Marxist, and, particularly, Weberian perspectives, provides further insight into the role of the state as it conditions the power dynamics of industrial relations systems. Palmer classifies two broad schools of Marxist thought: 'one view rejects the value of any institutional change as long as the political economy is capitalist. The second argues that institutional reform can be used to weaken gradually the hegemony of capitalist interests in society' (1983:22). From the Marxist perspective, one perspective sees change is possible, all see capitalist interests as dominant. Weber, quips Palmer, 'was not concerned with prescription, which is, no doubt, why he has no industrial relations following' (1983:24). Palmer suggests that Weber saw both conflict and cooperation as inherent in social relations, with social institutions developing 'out of these co-operative, conflictual relations', their form depending 'on the dominant group, and their dominant values' (1983:24-26). Weber's 'dominant values' and Marx's 'dominant capitalist interests', equate in capitalist social relations. Ideology thus provides a joint entry approach to employment interactions, allowing an integration of the Weberian 'point of entry' (the structure of employment relations) and the Marxian (class conflict). This overcomes the need for Godard, for example, to take only the Weberian entry point for his more critical, reform oriented approach (1994:23). In a dynamic system such as the spherix, dominant interests need reinforcing to persist. If the second broad school of Marxist thought is accepted, and the hegemony of capitalist interests may be weakened gradually, then the dominating values of the system may change. This will be reflected in the outcomes experienced by the interactors in the spherix.

As dominant values change, interactor position will be affected, again in terms of proximity to the locus of power in the spherix. In this conception of an industrial relations system, orbital proximity to the locus of power is conditioned by value systems. Thus capitalist conditioning of the spherix will result in employers predominating in close proximity to the locus of power. This will even be the case in social-democratic systems employing bargained corporatism, notwithstanding an expectation that in such social systems the gap between employers and employee proximity to the locus of power in the spherix will be slighter. In similar vein, patriarchal value-systems will condition the spherix such that masculine employees will predominate in closer proximity to the locus of power. In societies where the women's liberation movement has had greatest success, the gap between masculine and feminine proximity to the locus of power still remains, albeit to a slighter extent. Here masculine women have navigation towards the locus facilitated.

The relative positions of the interactors in relation to the locus of power, as well as their relative magnitude from their counterpoint's perspective, will be altered by a qualitative change in the system. An example of such a change would be a success by employee actors and their organisations in the political arena that achieves a move from market-individualism to bargained-corporatism. The move from 'paternalistic' to 'competitive' masculinism that is currently transforming gender relations in the workplace (Kerfoot and Knights, 1993) will do the same. Another example is the development of regulatory regimes to protect disadvantaged groups from discrimination and to provide equal employment opportunity. This intervention is altering the relative position of masculine and feminine interactors in terms of their proximity to the locus of power of the spherix.

The feminist critique of mainstream industrial relations theory has been undertaken by academics such as Forrest (1993), Pocock (1997), and Wajcman (1999, 2000). Pocock concludes that analysing gender relations in 'an approach which keeps both women and men in view within a fully gendered study of industrial relations, offers fruitful future terrain' (1997:535). Keeping both genders 'in view' has resulted in some confounding findings. Whilst some women can achieve success, for example, in corporate life, Wajcman has shown that 'even after two decades of equal opportunity policies, women are still expected to 'manage like a man' (1999:160). Others, such as Blandford, show that open gay and bisexual men gravitate towards lower paid, feminised jobs 'earning on average 30% to 32% less than married heterosexual men', and that 'relative to other comparable married heterosexual women, open lesbian and bisexual women report earnings 17% to 38%

higher, with the most reliable estimates of the marginal impact of orientation falling in the range of 17 to 26% (Blandford, 2003). This is attributed to gender, with open lesbians much more able to negotiate the sexual politics of male-dominated employment domains where they are 'unusually successful in gaining employment'.

The spherix conception may be useful in shedding light on masculinism, given the confounding nature of findings from keeping both genders 'in view'. Pocock suggests that 'appropriate attention to male advantage, to the shape and nature of masculine institutions, to the men who inhabit them and to the material strategies by which these men exclude or block women is critical to shaping effective action to counter masculine control in a range of public, political organisations' (1997:535). The only qualifiers to this are that lesbians seem more able to negotiate the sexual politics of male dominated arenas, and that some women are masculine, and intersex people may also be masculine or feminine; and, that sometimes one is masculine, and others, feminine. To speak of 'men and women', only, is exclusionary, and whatever, relates to 'sex' rather than 'gender'.

Gender relations are reflected and reconstituted in the household as well as in other institutional arrangements. Pocock highlights the importance of the domestic sphere in conditioning employment interactions, drawing on Gibson's study of coal-mining disputes in Queensland where the domestic economy was shown to be a key factor in decisions with regard to taking industrial action (Bramble, T., et. al., 1997:532). The political economy of the household thus becomes an important referent system in relation to the actors in any employment interactions spherix, in the same way that the political or economic system conditions the employment interactions spherix. Interactions in the 'community' have also been the focus of enlightening studies in employment interactions (e.g. Patmore, 1999) and need further integration in theorising that the matrix seeks to provide.

With regard to gender relations, in a masculinist society, the interactors in that employment interactions spherix strive to change the economic or political system in order to enhance their authority and move close to the core in all relevant systems, including the spherix. Following the conditioning principle of masculinism, it applies that the interactors will seek to enhance their authority in the full range of systems in order to enhance their domestic authority. The continuing growth in one-person households, or in same-sex partnerships, attest to new models of domestic systems at this time however, with the throwback to moral-conservatism of the Howard and Bush administrations, transformation of the social values of sexism and heteronormativity may well be reversed.

Industrial relations systems are shaped or conditioned by both gender relations and the relations between capital and labour. From feminist theory the power dynamics of masculinity can be understood, as the power dynamics of capital are revealed through the radical writers. This notion of conditioning, reflected in social institutions, can be extended to allow the incorporation of a range of other social values that exert conditioning influences on the behaviour of any employment interactions system. These include racism, Protestantism, ageism, sizeism and heteronormativity. As in the debate with regard to the interaction and primacy between capitalism and masculinism (Grint, 1991:200-212), there is no doubt that these institutional conditioners inter-relate and interact. Moreover, the power relations exerted by these dominant social values have tangible effects of advantage or disadvantage that are reflected in the proximity of the relevant interactors to the locus of power.

The proposition may be made that in a masculine employment interactions spherix, masculine men, women and intersex will predominate in inner orbits whilst feminine men, women and intersex will predominate in outer orbits. Research is required to substantiate this proposition beyond the findings described above pertaining to lesbians. Such research might also focus on case studies of change in dominant types of masculinity, and on processes of domestic intervention, particularly with the sexual phase of reproduction now morphing to a technological phase. Is, for example, the movement in wages with decentralisation in the level of bargaining in Australia an illustration of a trend in such an accommodation whereby those some women in the top deciles will do very well, with the bulk relegated to the bottom with feminine men?

Conclusion

The employment interactions spherix, by incorporating the range of power dynamics, including the quest for authority through property accumulation in our current masculinist capitalist society, provides *determinant relationships* between the elements of the spherix. As Hyman and Brough were early to note: 'if the notion of industrial relations system is employed without the postulate of a determinant relationship between the elements of the system, the danger is that these elements will represent no more than a check-list of actors, influences and institutions (1975:161) (*italics in original*). One dynamic of interaction has been suggested. The quest for authority in a masculinist spherix will motivate the interactors to propel towards the locus of power at the core.

The dynamic of the employment interactions spherix as described above arises from a consideration of the place of gender in the employment relations matrix. This provides an elaboration of the 'determinate relationship' between the elements of the system called for by Hyman and Brough. This hopes to do what Frankel called for in 1984 in order to 'arrive at a satisfactory theoretical and practical relationship which makes the (partnership) of class and gender with social movement theory possible' (cited in Williams and Lucas, 1989:153). It hopes to overcome the criticism of not linking the macro with the micro that is levelled at the social action approach, and allow room for a consideration of 'hermeneutics', for example, worker consciousness (features called for by Godard, 1994:11). The matrix does not 'impose a causal, static and linear structure upon what are in effect reciprocally related, dynamic, and complex social relations and outcomes' (Godard, 1994:8). Through the dynamic explored here an exploration of value change as reflected in contemporary society might proceed. The spherix is offered as one possible lens to the forces and dynamism of the field of movement encapsulated in employment interactions.

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