Gender, Work and Organization: A Gender-Work-Organization Analysis

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What can one say after 25 years? Well, it's good to start with the obvious, that is a great achievement, and so many congratulations to all concerned, especially all who have edited and co-edited and written and reviewed and supported, cared for and (like all good friends and relatives) moaned about, and no doubt done many other things for and with *The Journal*.

I. Tributes

Quite recently, I wrote in *GWO*, in admiring tribute, on how Joan Acker's work ...

... can be taken up in many different directions, and by those subscribing to very different epistemologies and ontologies. Those interested in “doing gender” or “doing difference”, and those concerned with gender regimes or inequality regimes, or with neo-Marxism, globalization or intersectionality, or with ethnomethodology or pay injustices, or with transversal dialogues in feminism, could all and have been joined up via her work. This joining was and is in and through a loose, sometimes distant, and more or less tolerant network of recognitions amongst researchers, in which *GWO* itself has also been central. In this way, Joan's work was a node, a reference point, a place where many feminist, profeminist, and feministic (and a few non-feminist) researchers could agree to start or finish, even if the differences sparked in-between. That, for me, is truly lasting legacy; she has been central in the building of a field and a network of scholars and activists. (Hearn, 2018)

In some ways, now this anniversary piece continues this story – and, of course, there are many different ways of telling the/a story – about that “more or less tolerant network of recognitions amongst researchers which makes up the institution of *GWO* itself”.

II. A personal take ...

I start with a short story on how something of my relation to this network developed. I could go back to 1977 (or I could go earlier) ... when on co-planning with an undergraduate student

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year group over three sessions what they should best study the following year on their course on “Organizations and Groups”, the students agreed that there should be sessions on “Women and Organizations”. This later became labelled as “Women, Men and Organizations”, and then later still as “Gender and Organizations”. This led on to collaboration with one of the then (so-called mature) students, Wendy Parkin, that has continued from then on for 40 years, with an early contribution critically reviewing what was then a somewhat disparate and fragmented field in *Organization Studies* (Hearn and Parkin, 1983).

A little later, in 1988-1989, I had the good fortune to be able to spend a year researching in Manchester University, and through that was involved in setting up the Manchester Campus Workshop on the Critical Study of Men and Masculinities, bringing together enthusiasts, from undergraduates to professors. It was through the regular meetings of the Workshop that I got to know David Knights better and also met Deborah Kerfoot, both then at UMIST and later to become *GWO* editors. Then, jumping forward a couple of years, my earliest direct memory of the movement towards *GWO* is from September 1992 and the Gender Research Conference, held at the now non-existent University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST). As far as I remember (but I could well be wrong), it was organized by the *GWO* co-editors to be, Deborah, David and Jill Rubery, and was a kind of launch or pre-launch of the journal. Shortly after, the journal was indeed launched in paper form, with the editors bringing together their very different commitments to research on gender, work and organization, ranging from Jill’s expertise in comparative labour market analysis to David’s in poststructuralist deconstruction, with a lot more in between. And in that combination and open-mindedness lay the strength of the base of *GWO*.

At that 1992 event David Collinson, Margaret Collinson and I presented a paper on ‘Current debates in theorising men and organisations’. The presentation laid a basis for another paper, ‘Naming men as men’, which became the first article in the first issue of the journal (Collinson and Hearn, 1994). To me, the reception of that article is interesting in more than one way. First, the article has sometimes been misunderstood, or rather without reading it carefully the non-reader has assumed it was a tale of essentialist assertions on men and masculinity, when it in fact was nothing of the sort, if not quite the opposite. Also, it happens to be the most cited journal article I have written. However, in fact the phrase “naming men as men” comes from an earlier and less cited source: from my former colleague, Jalna Hanmer’s presentation at the first international conference on men and masculinity held in Bradford in 1988 under the

auspices of the British Sociological Association Theory Group, and then published in 1990 (Hanmer, 1990). So, this is in itself a commentary on gendered citation practices (van den Besselaar and Sandström, 2017; also see King et al., 2017). In the current obsession with publishing in “high impact” journals, I often mention, especially to doctoral researchers, how publishing in a new journal that seeks to consolidate a scholarly field can be a really good idea.

III. Gender, work, organization ...

What is also interesting to me is how the three central concepts promoted in *GWO* – gender, work, and organization – have all become more problematic, perhaps much more problematic, over the lifetime of *GWO*, just as *GWO* and the field of which it is part has itself become more established, and in a sense successful. So, just as the field of gender and organizations has become more legitimate at the overlapping of gender studies and organization studies, so the concept of ‘gender’ has itself become more complex, more contested, less certain. Yet over recent years both ‘gender’ and ‘organization’ have become problematic concepts – perhaps ‘work’ less so?

Gender: First, gender ... and what is gender? As *GWO* has become more and more established, gender has become no longer clear. Going back to the 1970s gender seemed a much simpler matter, at least to some. The Anglophone application of the term from the structures of linguistics and linguistic structures was used as part of a political and academic move beyond given sex, as in the cultural and historical construction of sex and sexual difference. That position is no longer enough. Increasingly, gender is seen intersectionally, and is “intersectionalized”, so that it becomes more difficult to differentiate gender from further intersectional or transsectional perspectives. This applies even with the often neglected intersections of gender and age (Riach et al., 2015).

Sex and sexual difference are also gendered. Sex is a shorthand for some various differences, and many similarities. The separation of sex and gender is not always so easy, just as the sex-gender binary can be heteronormative in the light of queer and further critiques – hence the search for such terms as sex-gender system, sex/gender, gender/sex or simply gex. Then there are the third (and more) sexes, and third (and more) genders; clearly these are far from new across many societies (Herdt, 1994). Meanwhile, in the internet age, transgender(s) is/are (re-)asserted, in identity, availability, politics, and indeed mass media. More generally, gender, and sexuality, are becoming more subject to mediatization, and in turn differentiation.¹ More

broadly still, there are postcolonial, decolonial and critical race studies critiques that question the sanctity of the westernized and colonial(ized) concept of gender, as well as non-western critiques of Anglophone domination of, for example, queer studies.²

And paradoxically, there remains the question of significant difference in language. Even within European languages, gender does not necessarily quite work. In Scandinavian languages, *genus* and *kön* are not *quite* the same as gender and sex; in Finnish, a language like many others without gendered pronouns, *sukupuoli* is an old word that incorporates elements of both sex and gender, and also kin, even whilst reproducing the heteronormativity of two “sides” or halves. In languages where there is not a separate word for gender, such as in Russian, the English version is sometimes imported, at least for more academic debate.

In short, there are simultaneous, and in some ways paradoxical, namings and deconstructions of gender.

Work: Of the three key words of *GWO*, work is the least emphasized. Compared with, say, *Work, Employment and Society (WES)*, where work is central, work is, to my mind, downplayed. In *GWO*, the concept of work is rather rarely subject to sustained critical interrogation. Work is generally taken to mean employed work in employed jobs, even when the emotional, aesthetic or additional aspects of labour are considered. There are clearly many additional and various ways of understanding work, as, for example: forms of labour and labouring; the expending of effort and energy; the processes of producing and creating products; whether material and/or immaterial; even doing what one would choose *not* to do – not to mention the very work of unemployment, whether the work of survival or the work of being a “good unemployed person” under neo-liberal state regimes of activation. These further approaches to work, and their gendering, are not generally highlighted. Work is primarily framed within economically organized organizations, even if economic analysis is not so prominent. Work is certainly understood as political, though not necessarily a matter framed by oppression, exploitation, violence and violation.

Perhaps most obvious, yet still neglected, is the ambiguity, in English, of the very word, work. Most contributors to *GWO* are very aware of the importance of unpaid work, domestic work, and care work, and such forms of work are acknowledged in, for example, examinations of what are (ideologically) sometimes called “work-life balance”, “work-family reconciliation” or “work–non-work relations”; however, they rarely take centre stage. Of course, one might raise the question of how does organization, or organizations, figure in such unpaid work, but it

would be highly interesting to “begin” from unpaid and domestic work, and then analyse how organizations, of various kinds, construct, affect and impinge on that. These kinds of questions become even more obvious when seen in a global, or “non-global North”, context. As Bharati Sadasivam, Regional Gender Adviser for UNDP in Europe and Central Asia, puts it:

“Worldwide, women carry out twice as much unpaid domestic and care work – including raising children, caring for sick or elderly family members, and managing the household – as men do. In Mexico, India and Turkey, women do three times more care work than men. ... limits women’s choices, impedes ability to obtain formal education, secure good jobs, achieve equal pay ... women around world work *more* than men in total [including paid and unpaid] half of working-age women worldwide are in the paid labour force, compared to more than three quarters of men.” (Sadasivam, 2017)

Sadasivam continues by reminding that the 2015 UN Social Development Goals “call for recognizing, reducing, redistributing unpaid care work” (see <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>).

A final point on work concerns the contemporary transformations of work. Some forms of work are becoming more online, more virtual, less place-based. Much leadership and management is by skype, conference calls, email and related technologies. I do not see too much of this everyday work reality in *GWO*, yet. Other forms are subject to change through robotics and AI. In such processes as these, much employment is made precarious, as part of the gig economy, producing capital value for the few and creating some jobs in selected sectors. Two of the biggest ‘turker’ sites are: Amazon’s ‘Mechanical Turk’, which claims 500,000 ‘turkers’ from 190 countries at any one time; and ‘Upwork’, with about 10 million freelancers, from 180 countries on its database. Management consultants McKinsey estimate that by 2025, 540 million workers will have used one of these platforms to find work (Fox and O’Connor, 2015).

While some people, especially some men, gain from the growth in scale and sophistication of ICTs, many people’s prospects of long-term secure employment in the sector of their locality or their choice or as earlier assumed are reduced, bringing insecurity or worse. The 2017 PwC report, ‘UK Economic Outlook’, predicts that “around 30% of UK jobs could potentially be at high risk of automation by the early 2030s, with higher figures still in the US (38%) and Germany (35%), and risks “highest in sectors such as transportation and storage (56%), manufacturing (46%) and wholesale and retail (44%), but lower in sectors like health and social

work (17%).” Jobs associated with men are estimated as a third more at risk than those associated with women (also see Frey and Osborne, 2013).

Organization: At the same time as gender and work are in different ways changing ideologically or materially, the notion of ‘organization’ has also become less stable. So with these impacts working together, the gendered organization has become subject to both naming and deconstruction, perhaps even ‘subversion’. Organizations are no longer about a fixed structure at a certain time, in a certain place, but modes of organizing across time and place. For example, Costas and Garstén (2012: 1) noted, “[a]s organizations are seemingly increasingly characterized by change, fluidity and ephemerality, our basic conception of what an organization is, how we conceptualize organizational phenomena and empirically study them has been challenged.” In this situation, they suggest a liminal approach to organization, stressing the importance of the in-between in contemporary organizational life.

Through temporary and shifting membership, lean flexibilization, greater project work, network organizing, and so forth, the basic idea of “an organization” can no longer be taken-for-granted; organizational worlds are not separate entities. The elusiveness of the organization may be a feature of late modern “organizational” life. Coupled with this is the move to organizations across borders. It may be premature to say that all organizations and organizing are transnational, but certainly a lot of what passes for them is.

IV. So what kind of take on gender-work-organization is *GWO*?

There is so much that is excellent about *GWO* that it is hard to know where to start, so like a good family member I hope I am allowed to poke a little fun at, even criticize, *GWO*.

So, let’s state the obvious. First, and perhaps foremost *GWO* is a journal, with linked conferences. Initially, the journal was produced first in print, with a darker shade of pink which shifted to purple, and then, in my view slightly sadly, became online only. These two changes have changed it, at least for this reader, so that, for example, I don’t immediately scour it, as I used to, when it arrived in the post.

The articles that make up the journal conform more or less to the conventions of journal articles. Thus, this means certain length, certain reference to literature, the canon, and so on. As Helene Ahl (2002: 84) explains:

Scientific journal articles make up their own literary genre with its own distinctive marks. Literary theorist John Swales (1990) has analyzed articles in

international science articles (sic.) and found that they make more or less use the same rhetorical moves to create interest and convey their message. The introduction section, in particular, almost always follows the same three-step procedure. First, establish a territory by claiming the centrality or the importance of the research area. Second, establish a niche by indicating a research gap, making a counter claim or raising a question. Alternatively, indicate the continuance of a research tradition. Third, occupy the established niche. This is usually accomplished through the presentation of the work or its purpose and by announcing the principal findings.

Raewyn Connell (2015: 20) has amplified on this in discussing the nature of journal articles:

- “1. **It’s strongly stylized:** there’s a pre-arranged publication mechanism, the journal itself, with its own rules about style ... In media jargon, the writer is just the “content provider”.
- 2. **It’s cramped:** it lives and breathes in a severely limited space. Most journals have word limits, and often the limits are tight. ...
- 3. **It’s a communication to a limited audience:** a knowledgeable professional audience, not a wide public. Normally it’s wise to follow the conventions, and use the language that audience knows. Sometimes you might challenge conventions, but have a very good case for doing so!
- 4. **It’s self-contained.** It has to explain itself and complete itself – which is quite different from a book or thesis chapter. But unlike self-contained genres such as the short story or the literary essay, the journal article explains itself in relation to the work of other researchers. Thus it becomes part of a collective process of knowledge formation.”

Such features persist in *GWO*, as elsewhere in other journals, so there is somewhat inevitably a good deal of self-referentiality in the journal, perhaps enhanced through the associated conferences and conference practices. And that makes reflection on its contents and orientations all the more interesting, as, of course, there are many specific substantive characteristics of the journal.

Following its UK origins, the journal is still rather strongly orientated to UK, European and indeed Australian material, debates and authorships. Also, it is not the European parallel to a US-based journal (cf. *Leadership* and *Leadership Quarterly*; or *Human Relations* and *Human Resource Management*). Another feature is that most articles address employing organizations and work organizations, rather than religious, sporting, voluntary or political organizations – which is especially unfortunate with the current of classed, gendered, raced world politics (see *inter alia* Messerschmidt and Bridges, 2017). After all, politics and mainstream politics are also work, organizations and management (Niemi, 2010).

The focus of most articles is on meso-social relations and often micro-social relations rather than macro-social, societal and global relations, and on an organization or organizations rather than inter-organizational relations, itself still a sorely neglected field that is oddly with no journal of its own. For the most part, *GWO* is still very much about organizations in a place, rather than virtual, non-place based, and transnational organizations and organizing; similarly, contemporary organizations are foregrounded rather than historical studies of gender, work and organization (cf. *Leadership*, *Business History*, *Business History Review*). There is also much to be done on such issues as gender relations in international HRM, for example, in terms of the gendering of international business-to-business (B2B) activity, alliances, partnerships, supply chains, financial dependencies and other inter-firm relations, formal or informal, typically involving men at the top echelons of enterprises. And very importantly, and as noted, the grounded study of everyday unpaid work is rarely a major focus in the journal unless it is in relation to the impact of paid, employing work and organizations.

Disciplinarily, *GWO* is very much located within a social science frame, prioritizing critical perspectives from sociology, organization studies, management studies, social psychology, and cultural studies, rather than, say, humanities, economics, finance, technology studies, educational studies or transdisciplinary studies. There are relatively few engagements with gendered pay and remuneration, nor with the gendered workings of the global capitalist system, even though this is a growing field of feminist study (for example, Young et al., 2011).

Having worked in various departments or units of social policy, sociology, gender studies, and management and organization, and in various countries, I note that *GWO* often seems to be more well-known and more recognized, perhaps more at home, in some sociology, and management and organization studies departments than in, say, some social policy and more humanities-orientated gender studies units. This is a little odd to my mind. This is even more so when we see that in 2017 *GWO* was ranked 103rd out of 209 in the ISI Journal Citation

Reports in the ‘discipline’ of ‘Management’, and yet 6th out of 42 in the ranking in ‘Women’s Studies’. This reflects, in part at least, the different quantitative citation patterns in the two disciplinary areas, with the latter on average an area of lower citation rates than the former. Regardless of the various orientations of Women’s and Gender Studies as a discipline and area of scholarship, the production of *GWO* is related very much to Work and Organization Studies, and therefore it has a high number of references in the articles to journals in Management, which in turn raises its ranking within the Women’s Studies area.

And what next? There is a lot to be done over the next 25 years, and I look forward to some of that! To speak of the future in this context concerns both the future of gender, work and organization(s) *out there*, and the future of the journal on these questions *in here*. The shape of gender, work and organization(s) over the next 25 years is obviously extremely difficult to comment on. In terms of gender, at the very least there are likely to be further changes in relation to forms and relations of gender, sexuality and intersectionalities, including global inequalities of various kinds, persistence of (sexual) violence, and population ageing. Different future scenarios on gender and gender relations follow from alternative paths regarding, first, *gender/sexual equality and inequality*, and, second, *gender/sexual similarity* (homogeneity) *and difference* (heterogeneity) between women, men, and further genders. This includes to what extent the two-gender model remains dominant or is problematized. Seen simply, four scenarios follow through intersections of gender/sexual equality/inequality and gender/sexual similarity/difference, as follows:

- the *hyper-heteropatriarchies* scenario: greater *gender/sexual difference* with men diverging from women, and greater *gender/sexual inequality*;
- the *late capitalist gender/sexual* scenario: greater *gender/sexual similarity* with men, women, and further genders and sexualities converging, and greater *gender/sexual inequality*;
- the *bipolar gender/sexual differentiation* scenario: greater *gender/sexual difference* with men diverging from women, and greater *gender/sexual equality*;
- the *postgender sexual/gender blurring* scenario: greater *gender/sexual similarity* with men, women, and further genders and sexualities converging, and greater *gender/sexual equality*, with or without capitalism.

There are certainly contradictory pressures towards both unequalizing (for example, capitalist commodification of gender/sexuality) and equalizing (for example, sexual emancipatory movements) gender/sexual relations, and both gender/sexual differentiations, segregations and identifications, and gender/sexual de-differentiations, collectivizations and blurrings. Moreover, these tendencies occur at local, organizational, global and transnational levels, and most likely with contradictions in specific (work and organizational) sites and contexts (Hearn, 2015). Such different scenarios and differentiations highlight the possibility that gender relations may, in some senses, become more equal, yet class relations and other global relations of inequality may not. Although gendered and capitalist hierarchies have been constitutively and historically linked, this does not mean that this has necessarily to be the case in the future, especially with the development of reproductive and other technologies.

Indeed, gender, work and organizations are likely to be subject to further impacts, most obviously, climatic and environmental change including around food and water, and technological change, through ICTs, robotics, AI, virtualization and biotechnologies. Global inequalities in income and wealth are growing which means that work and organizations operate within those conditions and are also part of that process of reproduction. It has become common knowledge that across the global economy, “(a)lmost half of the world’s wealth is owned by one percent of the population. ... The bottom half of the world’s population owns the same as the richest 85 people in the world” (Fuentes-Nieva and Galasso, 2014: 2-3), and that this disparity has been increasing in recent years (Hardoon et al., 2016; Alvaredo et al., 2017; Oxfam, 2017). For this to happen, all of this needs organizations, and has to be “organized”.

Meanwhile, there are the diverse moves to other forms of direct self-organizing, sharing economies, cooperative ventures, and post-growth economic movements. The polarizations between the damning global inequalities and these local and glocal bottom-up initiatives around work and organizing may well grow in very confusing and contradictory ways (see Folbre et al., 2018). Together, all these are likely to lead to the development of new, more complex forms of work, organization and organizing. A recent account of the impact of “megatech” suggests these possible future crises and threats: nuclear warfare; AI/robotic warfare and militarism; ecological collapse; AI: the human/machine singularity; and the biotechnological revolution of life (Wilzcek, 2017: 39-40). These possibilities can be seen as threatening humanity or simply transforming gender, work and organization more modestly.

And then there is the question of change *in here*, with the obvious question: will the journal exist at all in 25 years' time? Or will there be new multi-media, interactive forms of knowledge transfer and translation, perhaps direct to the brain – or perhaps nothing like that at all.

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Notes

1. For example, Tumblr lists some 90 different sexualities (<https://ageofshitlords.com/complete-list-of-all-tumblr-sexualities-so-far>); Nonbinary wiki lists about 177 nonbinary identities (https://nonbinary.miraheze.org/wiki/List_of_poorly-attested_nonbinary_identities).

2. For a recent brief and very useful overview of some of these challenges in relation to gender and sexuality, see Gill and Orgad, 2018.

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