

Analysing Work: Arguments for Closer Links Between the Study of Labour Relations and Gender

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This paper argues that research on feminised terrain suffers a professional discount in the field of labour relations, and that understandings of work are impoverished by this discounting and the quarantining of “gender” in the study of working life. Secondly, the paper sets out a number of feminist concepts that illuminate understandings of work. Thirdly, the article poses a series of challenges that face feminist researchers at present, arguing that their attention to a number of issues – including the closer study of the material aspects of work, alongside its many other dimensions – remains a challenging and important task.

INTRODUCTION

Gender relations within any disciplinary area can be analysed on a variety of bases. They are reflected in the terrains that are chosen for scholarship (aircraft pilots, or secretaries; mines or shops; unionised workers or the informally employed) and the standing of work on these terrains. These relations can also be read in the methodologies employed (large surveys or interviews or anecdotes), in the founding theoretical concepts that evolve and frame study (the significance of “rules,” bosses versus workers, men versus women, white over black, the definition of “work”) and they can be read in terms of who holds position – of who is powerful in the discipline, who edits, convenes, assesses, promotes.

In this paper I reflect on two aspects of the disciplinary footings of industrial relations: definitions of terrain and their standing, and founding theoretical concepts. I reflect on the experience of working on the terrain of industrial relations, of how the tension between feminist and labour relations scholarship¹ has shaped my thinking about industrial relations, and vice versa: how the latter have affected my analysis of gender relations. I argue that the relationship between industrial or labour relations, and feminist scholarship remains tense and in some important ways, unfulfilled, but that this relationship remains a productive one where each side is enriched by a closer exchange. Unfortunately, much of the work in finding the productive ground for this exchange remains one-sided. In any meeting on specialised areas of study of

labour and industrial life, one is, these days, likely to find growing numbers of women present, whether in relation to labour law, wages analysis, or specific industry studies. This is not reciprocated, however, with respect to a growing presence of men taking their place alongside women studying gender, or making much use of feminist theory in the study of work. The study of labour relations stands to gain by better use of feminist theory. I also argue that feminism² faces some important tasks in extending its contributions, and I consider a number of these.

The paper falls into three parts. In the first, I argue that research on feminised terrain (in relation to women, gender, feminism) suffers a professional discount in the discipline of industrial relations. In the second part I briefly outline key feminist concepts that constitute some of that discipline's most useful contributions to understandings of work, labour and industrial life. In the third part I outline what I consider are significant challenges that gender studies and feminist academics can rise to meet in the field of labour relations. In meeting these, the dynamic relationship between feminism and labour relations can be pushed to more productive outcomes. Overall, I argue that understandings of key labour relations phenomena remain impoverished without the benefit of feminist categories, and that feminist analysts also face challenges.

This contribution is part of an ongoing dialogue amongst researchers about gender and industrial life (see Forrest 1993; Pocock 1997) and it mirrors in some aspects similar debates in other disciplines. Some will find this discussion repetitive and unnecessary. However, in this paper I attempt to push the argument a little further. What is more, this debate in industrial relations seems a little slow and one-sided, reflecting the preoccupation with "rule making" and institutions that has been the traditional ground of industrial life – terrain that is well known for its unselfconscious masculine character. The paper attempts to extend existing analysis and seeks ways to enrich the reciprocal possibilities between gender studies and analysis of labour.

TERRAIN: THE DISCOUNTED PRICE OF FEMINISED RESEARCH

One of the principle terrains of working life where gender relations have been frequently studied is that of gender pay inequity. Much of this research in many places has attempted to calculate the effect of being female on women's pay rates relative to men's. Such studies allow for a wide range of factors that might affect the pay of women, including those that differentiate the experiences of women and men in relation to their workplaces, occupations, human capital, and personal characteristics. Such studies even at their most sophisticated, leave at their heart a labour market phenomenon that survives the most elaborate specification: that on average women and men who are otherwise very similar, in very similar workplaces and occupations and

industries, continue to be paid differently, with men invariably on average paid more. Studies that attempt to isolate the effects of working in feminised jobs (with higher proportions of women) generally find that there is a cost associated with working in feminised workplaces, occupations and/or industries (Groshen 1991; Pocock and Alexander 1999). This cost is visited upon both the women and men who work in such feminised jobs: the price of feminised work extends to infect the many men who are unfortunate enough to work amongst women in occupations, workplaces and industries that are feminised. Others have attempted to go further and calculate the larger economic, political, social, educational and health costs of being female (COBF), beyond a mere wages differential (Headlee and Elfin 1996).

It is my contention that a similar professional discount applies to research on feminised terrain, and to finding oneself in feminised researcher company in the field of industrial relations. This contention is difficult to prove. It is, however, I would suggest fairly widely understood amongst women in the field, and amongst the relatively small number of men who take as part of their professional specialisation, the study of gender relations, or even more specifically “men.” Let me illustrate its possibility by means of an anecdote, then outline its possible sources, its lack of justification, and its costs.

Not so long ago I gave a paper about unionism at an industrial relations conference. After it, one of the discipline’s experienced seniors congratulated me on giving a paper, at last, that “wasn’t about gender.” Perhaps he was simply glad to see me off one topic – “women” or “gender” – and onto another. Perhaps he regularly congratulated colleagues who moved off their first terrain – say the study of coal miners – onto new research subjects. But I doubt this. More probable, it seems to me, was his view that I was finally onto “real” terrain (trade unions, in this case) and off a “special issue.” I think it unlikely that similar congratulations would flow to a researcher who made a move from studying industrial relations in (say) the maritime industry to analysis of masculinity at work.

“GENDER” OVERRIDES OR ELIMINATES OTHER CATEGORIES OF CONTRIBUTION

It is interesting to note that my previous contributions on gender and industrial relations theory and on women in trade unions, in the same industrial relations forum, were seen by my senior as contributions only about **gender**: they were not contributions about **theory**, or **unionism**. They were only about gender or women: in such a view, gender dominates – indeed *eliminates* – other possible categories of contribution. Such quarantining of gender contributions means that their more general implications for other sub-fields of workplace study or for theory, are pre-empted. If studies of gender in the steel or auto industries, or studies of women workplace representatives, are categorised as “gender” studies to the exclusion of consideration of their implications as industry or

shop steward studies, then such larger study is impoverished – even perverted.

This quarantining also occurs when conferences or other contributions are so organised that whole industries are categorised as “gender” terrain and therefore confined to gender streams. This is certainly an observable phenomenon in industrial relations where, not uncommonly, studies of occupations that happen to be female-dominated (like childcare or nursing) are placed in the gender stream, rather than taking their rightful place amongst other (more male-dominated, and therefore, “ungendered”!) industry cases. Of course all industries are gendered, and can be analysed with gender to the conceptual forefront. However, it is usually only female-dominated industries that are quarantined to gender streams – even when gender is not a primary area of their analysis. While construction sites and mines are almost never analysed in their maleness, feminised workplaces are always preceded and saturated by their femaleness – indeed, the prism of femaleness appears to eliminate other categories.

It is hard to visualise any other topic of research being so quarantined: inconceivable, for example, that research about car plants was read in ways that saw it as too singular or exceptional to make inferences about wages analysis, or power relations in the workplace. Or as too peripheral to attend to. Or – most unlikely – labelled as the specific study of men and placed in the “gender” stream. This quarantining of studies that include a “gendered” line of analysis to the margins of the discipline, limiting the implications that are drawn for other aspects of industrial relations, is no more justified for gender questions than it would be for the study of coal, steel or car production.

I am interested in men’s and women’s different reactions to the example of my congratulatory colleague and my inference of a discount applying to the study of gender. Women’s reactions generally hover in the cynical range: what did I expect? They see an unsurprising paternalism in the comment. Other men see it as a funny, even helpful comment: a well-intentioned attempt to connect with a relative newcomer’s work. I do not doubt that many would see even the mentioning of the incident as a carping act. Or as a single incident that tells us nothing in professional terms. However, getting under the skin of institutions is often facilitated more by anecdote and incident than by analysis of, for example, large employment data in isolation³ (Acker 1990; Hodson 1998). Regardless of the heat that men and women feel in hearing this story, I take it as indicative of a discount that applies to research on feminised terrain.

If the price of blundering into feminised jobs in the labour market is significant and persistent, as studies of the gender pay gap tell us, is it implausible to expect a similar discount applying to the professional work of those on feminised terrain in the field of industrial relations? It seems that feminised terrain has something of a compromised research strength in the eyes of many in the field, a low possibility for theoretical or other contribution. It is simply taken less seriously. I am not arguing of course that gender relations are the primary prism through which labour relations should be analysed: this

would be quite inadequate, given that gender is just one axis – though a significant one – along which power at work divides. However, I do argue that its study should not – at the very least – be discounted, and should be applied more broadly especially given its under-attendance in labour relations for most of the previous century.

Such discounting might have a variety of sources. Senior figures in the field of industrial relations – mostly men – rarely attend sessions which have gender in their title: they are invariably attended in the majority by women.⁴ This means that many men may be unaware of the insights being generated in relation to understandings of work in its gendered dimensions: their state of knowledge is unaffected. Alongside this, those most likely to make professional judgements – in relation to publishing, assessing and promoting – are unlikely to have good knowledge of the contributions being made in relation to material placed within “gender” streams or otherwise placed on feminised terrain. They may discount these contributions.

The costs of this mis-judgement are not immaterial. They are likely to be affecting the quality of teaching, the nature of research, the adequacy of theoretical concepts and so on. Current changes in the labour market make it of increasing importance to be attentive to feminised working terrains, to gender relations at work, and to informal work and occupations that are directly sexualised, like sex work itself. All around the world new forms of work are emerging or claiming greater attention. Many are informal and irregular, and a greater proportion is being performed by women. In Britain from 1996, women outnumbered men in the labour force (Bradley 1998). Around three-quarters of recent job growth in the US is attributed to the service sector, and feminised service sector jobs in that economy are expected to increase by a further 33 per cent by 2005 (Bulan, Ericson and Wharton 1997, 1). In many south-east Asian countries a growing proportion of GDP arises from the services sector, especially tourism and in some countries, particularly sex tourism. The sex tourism industry in Thailand now accounts for over US\$20 billion per year (de Albuquerque 1999; Kruhaug 1997) and both Thailand and the Philippines have in the past sponsored sex tourism as a national policy. Yet this form of labour receives scant attention in the world of labour relations, despite the uniqueness of its employment relations, its labour process, the “rule making” that accompanies it, and the complex power relations in which it is embedded. Much of the work in this area has been undertaken by sociologists, historians, women’s studies and international agency researchers. Important aspects of this growing form of work remain under-studied, leaving a role for work and industrial relations analysts.

The growth in service and hospitality industries where so many women work, women’s greater presence in management and in unions, declining male participation rates, rising female participation rates, and the growing tension that is evident between paid work, the family and the home, all suggest that analysis of gender at work is of growing significance. This is obvious in the research attention that is increasingly focused on caring work, emotional labour and work/

family/time issues. Much of this research is undertaken by women who find it profitable to place their work in its labour relations context.

ADDRESSING THE DISCOUNT APPLYING TO FEMINISED TERRAINS

Several possible strategies are available to those in the discipline to address the possible discounting of feminised research terrain. The first is to de-feminise it: to rename work so that it cannot be categorised as feminised either simplistically in its title, or in the ways in which ideas arising from feminist theory or practice are raised. For example, I might have titled this paper "Reinvigorating the theoretical and practical domains of industrial relations research." While this strategy can work well, most will find it dishonest and cowardly.

The second strategy is to exploit the material that the discounting of feminised research in itself generates – by writing about it as I am doing here, for example. This strategy alone might result in something of a dialogue between like-minds, however – a kind of inward looking research separatist strategy. Such separatism has been important in many fields to the development of critiques that challenge orthodoxies. However, long term separatism encourages the development of a gendered comfort zone, with costs in terms of impoverished labour relations research in the larger sphere and the continuation of disciplinary undervaluation of such work. It thus has limited potential. The third strategy is to encourage the discipline to change its practice and professional habits, so that the discount is removed, and the theoretical insights arising from work on the feminised field exert their influence at full value. This strategy is furthered by the firm (re)assertion and extension of such analysis, and might be assisted by more activity amongst men in the field of labour relations, in applying feminist concepts.

KEY FEMINIST CONCEPTS

What are feminism's key theoretical contributions and how much do they assist the work of labour relations scholars? I will mention a number that helpfully enrich the analytical concepts available to labour relations researchers. These concepts do not transform labour relations entirely. They do, however, assist scholars who want to understand labour relations phenomena more wholly. Without the use of some of the key categories of feminist research, industrial relations and labour are imperfectly analysed in a great number of places and situations.

The first and most obvious of these concepts is that of gendered categories: that just as the notion of "boss" and "worker" are pivotal to so many industrial situations, so are the notions of "men" and "women." Confusion about the ways in which the concept of "gender" has been inaccurately read as "women" (while "men" evade analysis) have been widely discussed (Collinson

and Hearn 1994). “Gender” does not mean “women” or vice versa.

The differences in power balance, employment situation, occupation, domestic location between women and men affect such disparate phenomena as their participation in industrial activity, management, unions, agreement making, and institutional influence and effect. Alongside this, feminism has argued the necessity of seeing and analysing the link between paid and unpaid work, between the private and the public, between the domestic front and the paid workplace. This has led some to argue for a definition of “work” based in the “total social organisation of labour” incorporating all forms of labour in its broadest sense, including voluntary, household, formal workplace labour and so on (Glucksmann 1995). Recent studies of power and gender at work continue to emphasise the importance of analysing the relationships between home and work, between paid and unpaid hours, along with work’s changing locations, as traditional work is restructured internationally (Crompton 1997; Bradley 1999; Carnoy 1999).

One of feminism’s prominent preoccupations over recent decades has been the admission of diversity amongst women and amongst men, critiquing the assumption of singular interests amongst women (or amongst men). Feminism has also assisted understandings of work by drawing attention to forms of labour that have been under-studied including emotional, “affective,” and sexual work (Hochschild 1983; Bulan, Ericson and Wharton 1997). Many authors have drawn attention to the ways in which women and men are (differently) embodied at work: the ways in which male and female workers perform their work and work their bodies differently, including sexually (for example, Pringle 1988; Adkins 1995; Williams 1992; Taylor and Tyler 2000; Bulan, Ericson and Wharton 1997; Brewis and Linstead 2000). Many of these writers, in drawing attention to **forms** of labour that are often under-attended in the definition of “work,” also pull understudied occupations and industries into view, extending the terrain of labour relations analysis.

It has also become increasingly clear, partly through the work of feminists, that institutions have characters, and great power in themselves, and this power is gendered (Acker 1990; Gatens and Mackinnon 1998; Ledwith and Coglán 1996). Women and men wield power in institutions differently, and institutions frequently wear a face and set of habits that embed male norms, that are not named as such – as gendered – but that place women as interlopers facing normalised male standards. Writers like Carol Bacchi (1996) have taken this analysis further, giving us the important concepts of “sameness” and “difference” with which to understand tactics in relation to established male norms. Joan Eveline has encouraged an inversion of male standards with attention to male advantage – a little like those engaged in studies of “race” and racism encourage the study of whiteness, in place of blackness (Eveline 1998).

Feminism has also offered methodological variation with its attention to the deconstruction of language, and attention to political discourse. While these are not the exclusive children of feminism these are concepts that have been put

to good use by feminists interested in questions of power, including power at work. Feminists have also made considerable use of qualitative methods, including ethnographic research, to peel back the complex layers of organisational and workplace life and examine relations and power at work. They have claimed qualitative methods including personal accounts as useful indicators of patterns worth pursuing; at the same time, many have continued to make use of quantitative methods.

Because feminism in so many places has been interested in change, in securing more power for women, and in understanding the ways in which men wield and retain power, it has also revealed a considerable amount about the politics of making change in public life and in powerful institutions. For example, feminists in trying to analyse unions and women's and men's voice in them, analytically separate the strands of representational outcomes versus constituency building. For example, Linda Briskin in Canada, built upon established categories in relation to democracy, and takes them further within the context of highly gendered institutions: as Briskin puts it "to resist the conflation of representation and constituency building and make visible the relationship between the two" (1999, 545). Women's long struggle for participatory democracy in organisations, a democracy that enables constituency building alongside positional power, is still under way in unions and many other workplace-based institutions. Observation of such struggles is illustrative of the nature of larger institutional politics and culture.

In a recent example, a large Australian union refused the requests of women members to form a national women's committee with organisational power – in Briskin's model, refused them the means of constituency building as a means to organisational power. Instead they "gave" women a non-voting place on the national committee (with the additional proviso, that the national committee would nominate the woman). Such non-voting, male-nominated substitutions are indicative of organisational efforts to maintain men's power. The men who propose and control women's representation (in place of a constituency-forming women's committee) are not fools. They understand the resistance that this makes to women's voice and participation. They are resisting women's entry, illustrating the complex oppositions that incumbents make to the political challenge of new interests. Feminists have long analysed the importance of separate organising of "new" or suppressed interests in the face of organisational resistance, alongside the tactical employment of "integrating" strategies whereby certain women achieve position alongside men.

Industrial relations professional bodies are capable of the same depredation of separatism, of opposition to constituency building, and the manipulation of representation through the promotion of women within their organisations – when pressed – through the careful selection of "men's women" (or "blokettes" as Australian women in unions call them).

SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES FOR FEMINISM IN THE FIELD OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Clearly, I believe that feminist theory and the insights and terrain that it draws attention to, are under-explored in many areas of labour relations research. However, in this section I would like to turn attention to some of the ways in which feminist approaches to the study of work and labour in Australia might be enriched and extended. I will mention seven.

Feminist policy interventions have moved between arguments of “sameness-to-men” and equality with men, and those of admission of difference and demands for different treatment from men. The most obvious expression of the former is in relation to equal opportunity policy and the removal of crude discriminatory barriers, and the second stance is reflected in relation to leave associated with pregnancy and maternity. Generally, arguing that women are different, and require resource intensive interventions to achieve real equality (like maternity leave, career development, training), is harder than the pursuit of the weaker case of equal opportunity. But the need to now argue difference-from-men and stronger interventions for women as a result of women’s and men’s different situations is pressing in countries like Australia at present. The failure to do so allows the appearance of progress when real gains in terms of women’s lives and those of their families are weak or non-existent.

The “family-friendly workplace” discourse in Australia is one example of the suppression of women’s differences at work, accompanied by a wide gap between rhetoric and reality, and between minor changes and real benefits. To give an example, the provision of breast-feeding breaks for women workers are sometimes promoted as a mark of progress for women. The claim that such breaks are a significant gain for women is exposed by greater articulation of women’s difference from men. Firstly, women as parents are different from men, not only in their capacity to breast feed their children but in the entire weight and practice of maternal versus paternal work. For most, being a mother in paid work in Australian society is quite different from being a father in paid work: the general language of “parental responsibilities” conceals such difference. Secondly, we need to ask what does a breast-feeding break really mean for a working woman? It necessarily implies that she is back in paid work while still feeding her child (i.e. fairly soon after birth), and that someone is bringing the child to her to feed and taking it away again, or that on-site childcare for newborns is available. Very few Australian women have on-site newborn care at their workplace or are likely to have the resources to have their child brought to them at work.

The effects of breastfeeding a newborn at work on a woman’s quality of life may be significant for the small proportion of women for whom this is possible. But such a gain needs to be set within a larger analysis – one that is clear about the constrained choice that exists for women who make a quick

return to paid work with a new-born. It seems likely that many women make a quick re-entry to work with newborn children in order to keep their place in the workplace, and/or to avoid the invisibility and isolation that many experience. To hail the achievement of breast-feeding breaks at work as a milestone for working women misses larger challenges: how to change work so that “career breaks” are less disastrous for women’s careers; how to financially support women with responsibility for small children, or who are breastfeeding, or who are recovering from childbirth? and there are others. How to redistribute housework and care of dependents to men? How to care for our children in a society where more and more of us must undertake paid work to keep households afloat? How to stem the impoverishment of community that is implicit in the growing number of household hours that are spent in paid and unpaid work for our employers?

“Family-friendly” discourses, with their implication that men and women equally share the work of family, conceal the gender realities. It is women who bear children, breast feed them, and undertake most housework in relation to the care of children, partners and the extended family. But the family discourse is surprisingly ungendered, in that specific claims for women and their differential claims are buried under the “family” cloak.⁵ A stronger critique of “family friendly” discourses and their ungendered nature – in a country still sporting third world standards of paid maternity leave – would be an important contribution from feminist analysts in labour relations.⁶

The growth in the services sector presents important opportunities for greater analysis of the presentation of the self at work – of the ways in which bodies, sexualities, emotions and capacity to relate to others, are being constituted as important aspects of work, productivity and reward. Relatively few Australian studies extend analysis of employer’s control to these more non-material aspects of service production and they now warrant further study.

Interesting examples exist. For example, Halford, Savage and Witz (1997) analyse banking, nursing and local government in the UK by discussing “embodied restructuring” and the emergent culture of “competitive masculinity.” While the traditional economic framework reveals new gendered structures of work, the redefining of “personal identities and equalities which are seen as desirable and undesirable” is also under way and is gendered (Halford et al. 1997, 65; see also Bradley 1998).

The gendered presentation of the self also extends to professional workers. I was recently part of a professional discussion amongst thirty senior lawyers in private practice about the differences in self-presentation required (and volunteered) by women and men. They easily agreed on material outcomes for women with children compared to men with children in their profession: working part-time was a sure indicator that one would never (or only exceptionally) make a partner in private practice. It was read as a clear signal of professional “seriousness” or its absence. Conversation then turned to the less material presentation of the self and specifically the display of family

photos at work. The women – to a person – scrupulously avoided photos of their children on their desk. They felt that clients and peers would discount their commitment if they ran up the flag of “mother” in their workplace: it signalled unreliable, torn, maternal, soft, “conflicted,” part-time. On the other hand, it was their experience that men liberally displayed their family at work, because its existence spoke “stable,” “human,” “balanced,” breadwinner, committed, mature. The displays and performances that people – professional or otherwise – make at work, and their gendered nature, are interesting in workplaces where they appear to be growing in importance, affecting remuneration and may constitute new forms of cultural control by employers (or peers).

Feminism has its roots in the analysis of power, and the potential it offers to understanding the unfair power of men over women, and to naming it in ways that challenged its pervasiveness and institutional habits. Of course the workplace is only one site where that power imbalance is expressed. It is interesting to note, however, that the growth around the world in women’s participation in paid work, has not been accompanied by a growth in interest in the feminist mainstream. While men in the discipline of industrial relations have been under-attentive to the fruit of feminism, is it also true that feminists have been under-attentive to the world of work? I think so.

The study of work or labour relations gets very little attention in significant international feminist journals like *Signs*.⁷ In Australia, the picture is very similar in journals like *Hecate* and *Australian Feminist Studies*. While there are exceptions (the work of Rosemary Pringle is an important example (1988, 1998)), reports of the Australian and international symposia and book reviews in these journals, reveal a similar pattern. Much of the energy of academic feminists has been preoccupied in recent years, the pages of these journals suggest, with work on race, literary criticism, citizenship and a diverse range of other issues. Indeed, the tendency to be preoccupied with theory led Bulbeck in making her summary of the 1998 Australian Women’s Studies Association Conference to make “a call to return research to the community instead of the tendency over recent years to over-theorise and under-research” (Bulbeck 1998, 343).

There is a serious risk that feminism in academic institutions has taken on too many of the garments of the male institutional model, frequently using obscure language, or pursuing the arcane, or over-theorising. Such tendencies – while forming only a part of feminisms’ academic outputs – connect too infrequently with the lives of women, especially the lives of the many women who earn so much less than women academics. Significant portions of feminist academia – at its most theoretical – seem preoccupied with issues and approaches that are far from the interests and necessary preoccupations of many women. Not all feminists should research work, of course, (any more than all industrial relations should focus on gender). However, in under-researching work, a sizeable slice of feminist research seems to fail to focus on *affecting the*

world and helping propel an understanding of and policy response to women's situation (in all its diversity) especially those whose situation is dire or unjust.

Let me illustrate with an example. A Women's Studies researcher recently came to talk to me about researching call centres. There are many interesting themes that threaten to make this particular form of employment potentially over-researched (paralleling the ubiquitous car plant of the 1960s): its growth, low pay relative to skill, Taylorist organisation, gender politics, what it reveals about new forms of non-union bargaining, flexibility and so on. But my friend was not interested in any of these things – in the prosaic details of material life in a call centre: who is paid what, and for how long, who controls and represents, how such work fits with household arrangements, and who defines flexibility. She was interested in how these women constructed their own subjectivity, in how these women defined themselves from within. I don't find this issue uninteresting. I am curious about how these women see themselves. Indeed I argue above for more attention to the non-traditional, embodied and cultural bases of relations at work, some of which impinge on identity and subjectivity. But it was once taken for granted that good feminist research is about trying to make change that is in women's interests, and this requires analysis that includes the material aspects of working life: bargaining, pay, harassment, relations with men, employers and so on.

Of course the definition of women's interests is highly contested. However, research is power. It can affect what organisations, and the actors within them, do. While subjectivity and the construction of the self may be interesting to the feminist academic, they present a small and incomplete way of seeing this research possibility and this workplace. What would the women who are studied get from it? Does such study constitute a form of feminist predatory anthropology? Alongside a more energetic application of feminist insights by labour relations academics as argued above, in my view it would be useful to see more feminist work on the terrain of **work**, combining the insights arising from analysis of the more traditional bases of power at work (wages, control, employer power, worker resistance, sexuality, and so on) along with those that arise from the preoccupations of current feminist and social theory such as the nature of subjectivity and worker identities.

Feminists and those at work in gender studies have enriched the methodological menu available to social science researchers through the use of qualitative methods and discourse analysis. There are also many who make regular use of diverse quantitative methods, or combine their use with qualitative methods. However, feminist researchers too often vacate the field of quantitative analysis, and at times display an aversion to numbers and quantitative analysis. This cedes too much power to men on important questions, and needs remedying.

Take the recent case of the 20-year anniversary of equal pay in Australia. This important win was not the result of economic arguments put in the industrial relations tribunals of Australia, based in quantitative studies.

While such studies were made (including by early feminist campaigners and researchers like Muriel Heagney and Edna Ryan), breakthroughs on equal pay were achieved through the political campaigns of women and changing economic and social circumstances. However, arguments about gender pay equity rely upon quantitative research, **alongside** case study analysis and traditional political activism.

In the case of economics specifically, feminists do not find Australia's economics faculties friendly training grounds: at honours and post-graduate level they remain male-dominated, with relatively few senior women academics challenging the norm. Too few feminist economists with econometric skills exist in Australia. This means that much quantitative study remains the preserve of men, many of whom have little awareness of the dense reality of gendered institutions, and ask questions of pay equity, for example, in quite different ways from feminist analysts. This difference of vantage point creates a need for more feminist use of statistical tools. Without this voice, discussion of important political questions remains male dominated. This was recently played out in the evidence of economists to the NSW Pay Equity Inquiry (Hall 1999), where mostly men appeared to argue women's worth – as occurred 30 years ago (D'Aprano 1978). Greater use of qualitative methods by econometrically skilled feminists studying gender would wrench back a little of the power held by male researchers at present.

It is not uncommon to hear women privately express irritation at the entry of men onto feminist terrain, and it is not hard to understand why there is resistance. For too long, in academia, the ideas of feminists have been resisted and discounted. With a rise in prominence, then, there is resentment to men's potential colonisation of terrain that women have diligently quarried out of obscurity. However, the study of gender requires the study of men, alongside that of women. The growing interest of some men in masculinities and gender has appropriately refocused attention upon the nature of men's power, culture, identity and the myriad workplace ways in which it is displayed and replicated. This has shifted attention away from analysis of women's "disadvantage," to men "advantage" (Eveline 1998) and men are in many ways better placed – at least in terms of research access – to analyse their gender, than women. Of course, they will find feminist concepts essential to that analysis. In my view, however, this "men's" work should be encouraged: any implication that gender is women's terrain is not helpful.

Turning to feminist political tactics in the field of labour relations, we find a strong traditional reliance upon the state to remedy problems – whether in relation to childcare, pay equity, harassment, discrimination, maternity leave, or sex work. Alongside this reliance upon the state, there is a dependence upon bureaucratic solutions. The case of affirmative action is illustrative, where a government agency has been focused upon extensive record keeping, monitoring and reporting. The submission of written reports, detailing employment data and institutional action has been the main instrument (much

reduced as it is today, by the conservative federal government). Even feminists in reporting organisations wonder at times at a set of procedures that – formalistically, and through the generation of much paper work – have too little effect upon the real fabric of organisations. Indeed, it is “on-side” women in many organisations who energetically prepare such documents and make the best of their organisation’s record.

It is not hard to see why feminist advocates have traditionally relied on the state and bureaucratic procedures to facilitate change, in a country where the state has traditionally played such an important role, especially in regulating work. However, at a time when state intervention is being reduced across the board it is perhaps useful to critically reweigh the possibilities of that strategy, the penalties that enforce it (or fail to) and the alternative possible levers for executing change. Such alternatives include external political organising, and non-government routes. This rethinking of strategy is difficult work in a world where so few levers for change exist. However, such rethinking is under way in other places. Feminists in Sweden, for example, have re-visited the traditional Swedish reliance upon “class-first, gender-second” strategies to develop a clearer articulation of, and program for, women’s separate interests (Curtin and Higgins 1998). It is timely for strategists in the area of gender studies to reflect upon strategic approaches and critically reweigh reliance upon government and bureaucracy.

Finally, many gender analysts have been diligently attending to the nature of men’s and women’s workplace relations. Important terrain has been mapped. However, it would be useful to know more about the resistances that men make to women’s power in institutions. This resistance takes many forms: dense webs of organisational cultures, a reluctance to make real change in housework arrangements, a willingness to see (some) women gain position offset by a reluctance to see women build their own constituencies as women, and so on. These resistances exhibit many morphing shapes. Slow change in the gendered character of organisations owes much to the slow naming of the resistances that powerful interests make to interlopers. Greater attention to these – and the successful responses that women deliberately make to them – are useful sites for more work by gender relations analysts.

CONCLUSION

It is well past time to eliminate the discount applying to feminist research and the study of gender in the field of labour relations. I contend that this discount continues to apply. It retards the quality of analysis of work. Feminism has been one of the most enlivening impulses in the study of work in recent decades, principally through the work of sociologists, historians and women’s studies scholars. It is the task of labour relations specialists to take that task more to heart, more often – to draw on feminist categories, terrain, the centrality of justice in its concerns – thus toppling the gender-blind heritage of

its male mainstream.

At the same time, gender studies analysts and feminist scholars have much to contribute to extended analyses of gender at work. Feminists in some quarters face a challenge to retrieve feminism's theoretical and community-based research impulses, and to re-focus on work, broadly defined, as a site of analysis that can be worked to influence women's experiences for the better.

NOTES

- 1 There is not "a" feminist scholarship or a singular feminism. A diversity of perspectives is canvassed in any introductory text on feminism. For the purposes of drawing out the general implications of "feminism" for industrial relations, I crudely generalise in what follows. Many feminists would argue with this approach.
- 2 Feminism is not, of course, the same as gender studies. But feminism, and feminists, gave rise to the field of gender studies and while some men work in the area – and men and masculinities are increasingly an object of analysis – it remains principally shaped by feminist ideas and the work of feminists.
- 3 Though analysis of employment data in the discipline of industrial relations certainly supports a contention of women's marginalisation.
- 4 Only two of the 35 attendees at the "Gender" seminar where this paper was first given, for example, were men, while 30 percent of those at the simultaneously run seminar on union renewal were women, (providing a neat example of my contention that women are entering historically male terrain rather more energetically than the reverse). These seminars were end-on to Australia's annual industrial relations research conference in 2000.
- 5 It is also interesting to note that these discussions are focussed upon the workplace and the place of the adult within it. They too rarely attend to the quality of life for children.
- 6 This is not to deny the many useful contributions that exist. See for example, the special edition of *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* edited by Gillian Whitehouse (1999).
- 7 I could find four out of the 59 published in 1998 and 1999, for example (including research on prostitution and domestic work). A small proportion of the books reviewed related to the themes of work

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