

## The gendered organisation: A positive critique

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**Abstract.** In this article we go back to basics – to the very idea of the gendered organisation. Probably all researchers on gender and diversity in the workplace have some notion, however implicit, of the gendered organisation. This applies in both empirical research and more general theoretical analysis of organisations and management. Our task here is to assist in making explicit what those assumptions may be and help us to take a critical look at how we understand and conceptualise ‘the gendered organisation’, and the assumptions that we bring with us in our own and others’ work.

We organise our discussion in two main parts. First, we examine the concept of *the gendered organisation*, by setting out a very short history, including some of the basic assumptions about the gendered organisation and some continuing questions in studying the gendered organisation. The second main part develops a *positive critique* of the concept of the gendered organisation. This positive critique involves the re-evaluation of several key elements: the concept of ‘organisation’ itself; the concept of ‘gender’; the relation of gender and sexuality; the relations of gender, sexuality, violence and violation; the intersection of gender and other social divisions; as well as some more general methodological critiques. This critical engagement is a necessary part of empirical and conceptual development on gender and diversity in workplaces and organisations more generally.

*Key words:* Gender, organisations, sexuality, violence, critique.

### A very short history of the gendered organisation

Organisations are gendered; that much we know. Since the 1970s the field of gender, organi-

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sations and management has expanded greatly. It is clear that the area of gender, organisations and management is now recognised in at least some quarters *outside of itself* as a legitimate and even important area. This is to be seen in the current market in publications, in the activities of mainstream international publishers (Sage, Blackwells, Open University Press, and Routledge are four examples), in journals, in courses within degree programmes, and in research groups, networks, and conferences. The expansion of this area of study has been marked by the foundation of the journal *Gender, Work and Organization* in 1994. Other journals that have been established include *Gender, Technology and Development* and *Women in Management Review*.

On the other hand, the field of activity is still precarious, indeed in many ways very precarious. The vast majority of mainstream/malestream work on organisations and management (organisation studies, management studies, organisation theory, management theory, as well as those relevant parts of business studies, international business and so on) has no gender analysis whatsoever or a very simple and crude gender analysis. In most business schools at least the position of gender-explicit work is very far from established. Even so-called critical scholarship on organisations and management does not necessarily engage with gender. It may be concerned with class, labour process, resistance, power, control, discourse, deconstruction, and so on, but does not necessarily take gender into account.

Furthermore, many of the gains, insights and forms of organising that have been achieved are not secure. Many do not have long-term 'base' funding in the form of, say, core courses within degree programmes. Much depends on the activities of enthusiastic and committed individuals, often employed to do 'other things', so that if they leave the teaching or the research simply vanishes. Also, publishing outlets are by no means secure; they depend on: publishers' interests and willingness to back an area; on consumers; and again on enthusiastic academics as writers and publishers working long hours for very little monetary reward. *The International Review of Women and Leadership* has recently stopped publishing.

There are also uncertainties and sometimes odd variations in the interests of students, so that one year a course is the 'great new thing', while a few years later the 'topic' is passé or no longer of much interest; then the interest may revive a few years later again. I have seen this several times since I started teaching on this area 25 years ago. Interest from students in the area thus seems to come and go, even though the social conditions change rather slowly. Some students, especially younger students, seem to think that most of the problems have been solved and it is all now up to the (non-gendered) individual. Some (often, but by no means always, relatively older) male academics also now seem to see studies on gender as old-fashioned, as something that was important in the past, and is not so important or theoretically interesting now.

Recent research and literature on the gendering of organisations has been strongly influenced, though sometimes indirectly, by debates in and around feminism, and of recognising women and women's situations, experiences and voices in organisations and management. During the 1970s and 1980s, the two most influential feminist or feminist-influenced sets of literature on gender and organisations have come from marxist and socialist feminism; and writing on «women in management». Sexuality was not generally the central focus of interest of these studies. More

recently, there have been increasing numbers of feminist and pro-feminist studies on gender, and on particular divisions of labour, in organisations, which address sexuality to a greater or lesser extent (for example, Adler & Izraeli, 1988, 1994; Walby, 1990; Cockburn, 1991; Witz, 1992; Savage & Witz, 1992; Mills & Tancred, 1992; Davidson & Burke, 1994; Reskin & Padavic, 1994; MacEwen Scott, 1994; Due Billing & Alvesson, 1994; Wilson, 1995; Collinson & Hearn, 1996; Oerton, 1996; Rantalaiho & Heiskanen, 1997; Alvesson & Due Billing, 1997; Davidson & Burke, 2000; Wilson, 2000; Halford & Leonard, 2001; Aaltio & Mills, 2002). Furthermore, in some radical and anarchist feminism the very idea of organisation(s) is held to be dominated by men, and so subject to critical theory and practice.

In the late 1970s the field was opened up significantly by Rosabeth Moss Kanter's (1977) extended case study of a large US corporation in the book *Men and Women of the Corporation*. This was and still is an important text that translated the agendered bureaucracy into something that was intensely gendered in organisational practice. However, Kanter stopped short of presenting a fully gendered account of power, arguing (interestingly following her first citation of Karl Marx) that organisational position and activities rather than gender determines power. This is even though she notes that a preference for men equals a preference for power (pp. 197 ff.)

When we started researching and writing together on organisations in the late 1970s our primary interest was on gender relations in organisations. We began to assemble information on the gender division of labour, the gender division of authority, and, to a lesser extent, sexuality in and around organisations. We drew on almost whatever sources that could be found (Hearn & Parkin, 1983, 1992). We initially attempted to make sense of the area through two main devices: by gendering Burrell and Morgan's (1979) well-known fourway typology of organisation theory; and by considering the gendered studies on division of labour and work, authority and power, and sexuality, and the interrelations of these three domains. These latter processes have some parallel with the more general social processes recognised by Connell (1987): production/work/labour relations, power, and cathexis, that make up the gender order and gender regimes.

An important part of feminist and gender critiques has necessarily been the recognition of the neglect of gender in mainstream or malestream organisation and management studies. Other aspects of critique of the mainstream have addressed 'classics'. An example here is the critique of bureaucracy, as partially initiated by Kanter, and continued in a much more thoroughgoing way by Kathy Ferguson's (1984). *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy*. This has itself become a classic text in this debate, that has in turn been subject to further feminist critique by Due Billing (1994). Aupperle (2001), for example, has made a close comparison the insights, in terms of metaphors, of the work of Mary Parker Follett and the work of Gareth Morgan (1986), with the elevation of the latter and the forgetting of the much earlier former.

In familiarising ourselves with what had and had not been studied, it gradually became clear to us that there were various inadequacies in much literature of the time. These can be characterised through a number of tendencies:

- To consider gender, if at all, in rather simple, dualist ways, most obviously in the use of sex/gender role models of gender relations that have since been subject to overwhelming critique (for example, Eichler, 1980; Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 1987);
- To focus primarily, often exclusively, on the division of labour;
- To consider organisations out of the context of their societal relations, including the domestic relations of organisational members; and
- To neglect or ignore sexuality.

Joan Acker (1992) performed a very valuable synthesising analysis when she set out four major *gendered processes* in organisations: the production of gender divisions; the creation of gendered symbols, images and forms of consciousness; interactions between individuals (women and men, men and men, women and women); and the internal mental work of individuals. In addition, these gendered *processes* intertwine with organisational culture(s) and organisation sexuality.

In the 1990s there has been increasing methodological development and divergent pluralism in feminist and critical gender research – hence the move to ‘feminisms’. Calás and Smircich (1996) provided a very useful, if somewhat over-classified, overview of feminist approaches and interpretations.

In this period further trends and emphasises have included:

- Growing recognition of the specific gendering of men and masculinities in organisations and management (Collinson & Hearn, 1994, 1996);
- Move to emphasise the centrality of gendered practices and ‘doing gender’ in organisations (Rantalaiho & Heiskanen, 1997); and
- To the ambiguous, contradictory and paradoxical nature of gendered selves in organisations and management (Kondo, 1990).

Most recently, there have been various moves from a focus on the nationally based, single organisation to that on transnational, multi-organisations. Key debates here are the gendering of organisations in the contexts of postcolonialism, globalisation, glocalisations, the growth of multinational and transnational corporations, ICTs, ‘Third World’ development, Women in Development (WID), Gender in Development (GID), and an incipient consideration of men in development. Such shifts can be seen as compatible with increasing attention on multiple social divisions and oppressions; whether these are conceptualised within poststructuralist, postmodernist and deconstructive approaches, on the one hand, or increasing complex materialist epistemologies, on the other.

### **The basic assumptions**

The fabric, texture and existence of organisations, both in their formation in the context of external social relations and in their internal structures, documentations and social texts, are gendered. Most organisations are doubly gendered, in the sense that the public domains and organisa-

tions within them are dominantly valued over the private domains, and that within organisations the structure and processes are themselves gendered. The internal workings of organisations are gendered in both the distribution of women and men, and the distribution of gendered practices. It is important to recognise the gendering of organisations even when they totally or almost totally consist of women or of men.

While the number of different ways in which organisations can be gendered is immense, it may be helpful to build up a picture by focusing on a limited number of some typical differences:

1. The gendered division of labour, both formal and informal. Women and men may, through processes of inclusion and exclusion, specialise in particular types of labour, so creating vertical and horizontal divisions within organisations.
2. Gendered divisions of authority, with typically men exerting more authority over both women and other men. These interactions of gendered division of labour and gendered divisions of authority produce, when consolidated in a formalised structure, gendered bureaucracy (See Ferguson, 1984; Bologh, 1990; Morgan, 1996).
3. Gendered processes between the centre and margins of organisations. These may be literally or metaphorically spatial in terms of the distribution of power and activity between the center and the margins of organisations. The 'main aim' of organisations tends to be dominantly defined by men and men's interests (Cockburn, 1991). 'Front-line' activities are often staffed by women, while 'central' activities may be more often performed by men. The casualisation, and hence implicit dispensability, of employment may also affect women workers more just as it may affect black workers and, in different ways, young and older workers.
4. The gendered relationship of organisational participants to their domestic and related responsibilities. Women typically continue to carry the double burden of childcare and other unpaid domestic work, and may carry a triple burden of care for the other dependents, including parents, older people and people with disabilities.
5. Gendered processes in the operation of sexuality and violence within the organisations, including the occurrence of sexual harassment and the dominance of various forms of sexuality over others. Sexual processes interrelate with gendered violence in organisations.

These features are discussed in a broader context in Harlow et al. (1995).

These five elements can be understood a part of a picture of how gendered organisations are constructed. In particular organisations these elements interact with each other in ways that may reinforce or contradict each other. Frequently these interactions are ambiguous, paradoxical and open to multiple interpretations. Thus these gendered processes and their interrelationships should not be seen as monolithic. Of particular interest is the impact of atypical gendered positionings, either in terms of women or men occupying atypical positionings or in the use of atypical gendered practices. While atypical gendering may be a means of organisational change, not least in the transformation of the discourses of and on organisations, the positioning of «women managers»,

«women doctors», «men secretaries», «male nurses» and so on should not be seen as necessarily subversive. Indeed it is quite possible that the production of atypical gendering can reproduce dominant gendered patterns within organisations, albeit in more subtle ways (Oerton, 1996).

This leads to two further issues. First, there is the question of how gendered processes are reproduced in organisations. The elements and their interconnections are occurrences in change, flux and becoming. Although men's dominance is profound, it is neither monolithic nor unresisted. It has to be continually re-established, and in the process it can be challenged, subverted and destabilised. For these reasons, linguistic and discursive processes of differencing in organisations, for example, in definitions of what is and is not defined as «legitimate» or «illegitimate», are crucial (Cockburn, 1990). Second, there is a need to be alive to the likely cross-cultural and historical inapplicability of particular gendered concepts, that may appear to be appropriate to the analysis of society and organisations here and now.

To summarise so far, in the identification of the gendered organisation, there is:

- Some kind of focus on gender;
- Gender is seen to some extent at least as a determining element;
- There are significant social relations between genders and amongst/within each gender;
- These can be interpersonal and structural, material and discursive;
- Social life is given various other gendered meanings that are not necessarily tied directly to gendered persons (for example, gendered animals, objects, places).

### **Some continuing questions**

At the same time, and finally in this section, the conceptualisation of the gendered organisation raises a large number of further questions. It is now clear that there are a very wide range of uncertainties raised by and in the study of gender, organisations and management. These include:

- How are key concepts (sex, gender, women, man, sexuality, queer etc) to be understood, and what difference does it make to strategies of research and emancipatory research?
- To what extent is it possible to do feminist, pro-feminist and other critical gender research within existing (malestream) paradigms in organisation and management theory, studies and thinking?
- To what extent is it possible to seek change existing (malestream) paradigms in organisation and management theory, studies and thinking?
- How can women's and other-gender defined voices be best brought within understandings and explanations of organisations and management?
- How are the variety of women's and other-gender defined experiences to be assessed?
- To what extent is it appropriate in research to seek change within organisations?
- Are certain methods more/most appropriate for feminist, pro-feminist and other critical gender research?

- What should count as knowledge in the development of feminist, pro-feminist and other critical gender research?
- Should men, women and other-gender defined researchers follow different research strategies?
- What should men, women and other-gender defined researchers do to overcome gender power differentials in the research process?<sup>1</sup>

## **A positive critique**

The tradition of critique is long and complex, with many divisions and changing features. The form and character of critique clearly varies according to different strands and positions. However, the critical tradition generally involves an engagement with emancipatory interest, attention to issues of power, reflexivity, an understanding of the social construction of knowledge, and recognition of the ongoing interrelations of theory and practice; and of structure and hermeneutics, rather than any sense of fixed utopianism or methodological stasis (Hearn, 1998a). We now consider some elements of the positive critique of the gendered organisation, beginning with the very idea of ‘organisation’ itself. These elements are both approaches to and objects of critique.

### *The critique of ‘organisation’*

Organisation, singular, refers to the acts and process of social organising. Organisations, plural, are those *particular* social collections that result from those acts and processes. But organisations are not to be thought of mere outcomes. Instead they should be understood as social processes in a state of becoming something else. Organisations, and indeed actions within organisations, are always embedded in social contexts. This context-embeddedness means that it is necessary in conceptualising and analysing about organisations to bear in mind that attempts to characterise organisations are provisional.

Furthermore, organisations are both *social places* of organising and *social structurings* of social relations, whose interrelations are historically dynamic. Another is that organisations are not collectivities formed simply by the individual, intentional action of their founders and members. Rather organisations occur in the context of pre-existing (organisational) social relations. To paraphrase Marx and Engels (1970): «organisations make history but not in the conditions of their choosing.»

At its simplest, the notion of an organisation conjures up the picture of a factory, an office, even a university – something that can be seen, and that appears to function within four walls.

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<sup>1</sup> These questions are a development of earlier questions posed by Albert Mills in the handout ‘Gendering Organizational Knowledge: Issues, Questions and Debates’, and I am very grateful for this inspiration.

However, such an idea of an organisation is a fantasy. The picture of the visible organisations does not even come from the heyday of the Industrial Revolution; it stems if anywhere from the eighteenth century, with the relatively isolated industrial mill that could be *seen*. It was with the passing of this organisational form to the multiple-unit 'organisation' that could not be fully seen that, rather paradoxically, the idea of the organisation, and thus organisation theory, became constituted. By the height of the nineteenth century Industrial Revolution, the isolated organisation was already to a considerable extent decomposing and anachronistic. Indeed its decomposition was at the same time accompanied by its diffusion and expansion. As organisations «grew in size» and became more consolidated and more powerful concentrations of resources, they also became more diffuse and less concentrated at particular times and places. Their expansion was not just upwards and outwards on the same site (within four walls or expanding those four walls), but it was also through horizontal and vertical *connection* and *integration*, and above all geographical and temporal expansion and diffusion. The organisation was no longer a simple place, or indeed a simple time.

The notion of organisation, and thus organisations, has become progressively more complex. It still refers to the individual organisation, but it also encompasses conglomerations of organisations. Within such multi-organisations there are of course further smaller sub-units that might often reasonably be called organisations too. At its simplest, one can distinguish: large complex multi-organisations of many other organisations; intermediate individual organisations; small organisational sub-units; and paper or cyber organisations that do not exist in a specific time-place reality.

Whereas previously most organisations could be relatively geographically and spatially isolated in a particular place, this is increasingly becoming problematic, as organisations become organised across time, space, and even cyberspace and cybertime. The place of the notion of organisation in relation to globalisation and glocalisation is becoming progressively more complex. This means that the rather rapid change in the relationship of time and space – the so-called space-time continuum – makes it increasingly necessary to question the equation of organisation and *place*. Accordingly, this in turn makes the distinction between organisations as places and organisations as the structurings of social relations more important. Thus, the once relatively stable equation of organisation and place, *the assumed placing of organisations in a specific place*, is now being disrupted, and is probably to be disrupted further in the future. This means that the single place-based organisation becomes reconceptualised as just one temporary organisational form (of social relations), not the major or most persistent form. There is a need to consider organisations as a shorthand for a range of social connected structures and processes that include multi-organisations, inter-organisational relations, networks, network organisations, and net-organisations.

Organisations are commonly seen and understood as places of discourse, of activity, of communication, even of noise, rapidity and speed. Yet what happens in organisation often also involves silence, not just in the sense of quietness, but in the sense of that which is not spoken. Organisations are continually structured and practiced through *the unspoken*. Accordingly, one might re-understand organisations as very much (subject to) *unspoken forces* – including gender, sexuality, violence and violation. The notion of 'the organisation' is thus itself somewhat problematic.

*The critique of 'gender'*

Gender and gendered power relations are major defining features of most, perhaps all, organisations. Organisations are not just embedded in gender but pervaded and constituted by and through gender; and at the same time organisational realities themselves construct and sometimes subvert dominant gender relations and even gender itself. When gender is referred to it may be usual to think of 'men and women' and the 'relations between them'; this is certainly part of gender, but it is only a part. For one thing, gender is just as relevant in relations between women and between men. These are still very much gendered relations. This just as in the same way questions of race and racialisation are often relevant in understanding what is happening in situations and indeed organisations that appear to only involve white people.

More generally, gender has now taken on many other more complex meanings. These various meanings and understandings of gender are themselves both contested and central to the analysis of (gendered) organisations. The distinction between sex and gender was recognised in the 1960s and 1970s by feminists and others attempting to develop a more critical account of women's and men's relations and positions in society. It was a way of making it clear that what was often thought of as natural and biological was in fact social, cultural, historical and indeed political. Oakley (1972) set out this differentiation between 'sex' as biological sex differences; and 'gender' as the social and cultural constructions of those differences. This kind of sex/gender approach has been very important in generating greater attention to studies of sex differences and their relative absence (see, for example, Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Jacklin & Maccoby, 1975; Durkin, 1978), sex/gender roles, sex role socialisation, and masculinity-femininity scales. Much of this work in the 1960s, 1970s and even the 1980s, particularly within psychology and social psychology, was, however, itself placed within the context of relatively positivist understandings of gender. This applied especially to the development of masculinity-femininity scales, their empirical refinement and use to correlate with other measures of the person.

There are a number of distinct problems with 'Masculinity-Femininity Scales' (see Eichler, 1980). These include: the relationship between M-F Scales and Sex Role Stereotypes; the cultural specificity of statements used in their construction (such as, 'In American society, how desirable is it for a man to be ...'); the obscuring of the relation between cultural ideals and actual practices; neglect of differences depending on which gender is assessing which gender. These kinds of approaches to 'gender' also represent self-ratings of subjects measured against stereotypes of judges, ossified into scales, so that concepts predefine and reify gendered reality.

There are many complications in conceptualising gender and defining what gender is, particularly so within positivist paradigms. One difficulty is: it depends on who is asking the question, and why; and it depends on who is answering the question, and why. For example, feminists are likely to have very different concerns to most men when talking about masculinity. Another pervasive constraint is the persistence of dualisms and dichotomies, for example: female/male; woman/man; feminine/masculine; femininity/masculinity; girls/boys. While clearly these are important differentiations, there is a sense in which they only speak to part of the possibilities of what

gender is or might be in different situations and societies. Indeed, no longer is it possible to reproduce the dichotomous separation of sex and gender that characterised sex role theory of the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, the sex/gender approach to gender somewhat paradoxically takes us back to biology. It rests on the assumption that a woman is someone who is socially constructed member of the 'female sex', and a man is likewise a socially constructed member of the 'male sex'. The notion of 'sex' used here is usually shorthand for a number of physiological features, particularly primary sex characteristics and secondary sex characteristics.

However, all the various primary and secondary features are not always so easily described as simply 'female' or 'male', and indeed be further complicated by a range of biological, cultural and bio-cultural factors and conditions. Both 'females' and 'males', and 'women' and 'men' are variable categories, including old/young, (in)fertile, presumed females/males. Other complications to any simple sex/gender model arise from the considerable cross-cultural variations in usual somatypes between cultures, following from working practices, diet and hereditary patterns.

Even with these and other difficulties, the sex/gender model has prompted much path-breaking work on gender, gender relations and gendered power relations. Within this general framework, there are many different approaches – some drawing on the notion of behaviour and developing the notion of sex/gender role; some attending to attitudes, self-concept and gender identity; some focusing on social categories and structural relations, as in the concept of collective sex/gender class. In many of these approaches gender has been understood as way of moving away from biology and of recognising a relatively autonomous set of social and cultural relations.

Moreover, debates about the meaning of gender have continued to develop rapidly during the very time that the field of gender and organisations has become more established. Of special significance has been the elaboration of distinctly sociological and social structural approaches to gender. These include the articulation of structural concepts of gender relations in patriarchy, gender systems and dominant gender orders. Such analyses were a major point of theoretical and political attention in the 1970s. However, by the late 1970s, at about the same time as sex role approaches were themselves being criticised, there were growing critiques of the concept of patriarchy. Similar arguments have also been made with regard to the critique of categoricism in conceptualising gender. Categoricism refers to the use of fixed categories of gender in theorising and analysing gender and gender relations (Connell, 1985, 1987). These developments can also be seen as part of the general critique of positivist social science that has gathered pace since the 1960s.

The outcome of these simultaneous, if somewhat separate, critiques of, first, social psychological concepts of gender as sex role and, second, overly structuralist concepts of gender as determined within patriarchy, has been a movement to a more differentiated, more pluralised, yet still *power-laden*, approach to gender. This is encapsulated in the notion, gendered power relations. For example in analysing masculinities, Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985) investigated relations between men and between men and women, resistance, social and intrapsychic constructions; and hegemonic, complicit, subordinated forms of masculinities. This reformulation of gender fits closely with revisions of patriarchy (or patriarchies) as historical, multiple structures (for example, Walby, 1986, 1990; Hearn, 1987, 1992). In recent years, there has been increasing attention to gen-

dered practices, processes of gendering, masculinity/ies; gendered material/discursive practices; gendered discourses and discourses of gender; plural/multiple/composite masculinities and femininities; the interrelations of gendered unities and gendered differences (Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Hearn & Collinson, 1994); and life stories and subjectivities.

Another difficulty lies in the very distinction between 'sex' and 'gender'. Perhaps the greatest challenge to a simple, dualist view of gender is represented by transsexualism and transgenderism, in its widely different social and cultural forms. This has itself prompted a significant expansion of transgender studies and studies of transgenderism in recent years (for example, Ekins & King, 1996; Kulick, 1998). The sex-gender distinction has itself been subject to critical interrogation and deconstruction in recent years. Bondi (1998) has recently clarified the following three major problems with the distinction (citing Edwards, 1989):

- First, there is no convincing evidence that gender itself carries a necessary liberatory potential; just because gender is socially constructed does not mean that it can be changed any more easily than sex (citing Evans, 1994);
- Second, the sex-gender distinction is closely linked to other dichotomies, most obviously nature-culture and body-mind. If gender corresponds, it might be asked why a concept of gender is necessary; if gender involves the transcendence of mind over body, then the question remains why should this 'unsexed' mind correspond to gender if it wholly disconnected from sex. It can thus be argued that the sex-gender distinction reinforces its own dichotomies, and even repositions the male/masculinity as the norm (citing Jay, 1981; Lloyd, 1989; Butler, 1990; Grosz, 1994; Moore, 1994);
- Third, the sex-gender distinction implies that sex and biology are pre-social or free of the social; but biology is itself constituted in the social (citing Harding, 1986; Fitzsimmons, 1989; Haraway, 1990; Soper, 1995).

Butler (1990) has argued that the sex/gender distinction is itself a social and cultural construction; it is not that gender is the cultural arrangement of sex difference, but that the sex/gender difference is a cultural arrangement, dominantly constructed in terms of the 'heterosexual matrix'. Thereby our attention is directed to the social and cultural construction of the sexed body. On the other hand, there is a danger in such an approach that the physical, biological, material body may be lost in the search for social inscription and performativity. In the light of this, a more measured movement may be made towards recognising *both* the socio-cultural formation of the gendered body and its physical, biological, material existence; thus there is not just one possible relation of the biological sex/gender and the social sex/gender, but rather many possible such relations and interrelations.

Thus gender is not one 'thing'; it is contested, complex and differentiated. It is necessary now to provide an open-ended definition of gender. Indeed an important part of the critique of the concept of the gendered organisation follows from the increasing complexity of understandings and meanings of gender that has occurred at the same time as the field of gender and organisations has itself become more established.

*The critique of sexuality*

In the light of recent debates on gender, sexuality and organisations, some authors have suggested that it is possible to distinguish a sexuality paradigm and a gender paradigm in organisational analysis. We remain extremely doubtful about this possibility. While organisational analysis focusing on sexuality is often neglected and needs to be more fully developed, this is not to be understood in any way that is competitive with 'gender'. Whilst we have written at length on the neglect of sexuality in organisations, and have attempted to rectify this omission, we do not think that the establishment of any separate 'sexuality and organisations' field or sexuality paradigm, in competition with the analysis of gendered power relations, should follow. To be absolutely clear on this: we do *not* advocate a separate paradigm for sexuality and organisations (Hearn & Parkin, 1995). We would make similar arguments on any would-be paradigm of violence, violation and organisations.

A challenge is how to increase the focus on sexuality whilst not creating a separable object of analysis. We have previously discussed extensively the relationship of sexuality, gendered power relations and organisations (See, for example, Hearn & Parkin, 1983, 1986-1987; Green et al., 2000). Sexuality can be understood as both a foundation of gender (MacKinnon, 1982) and a focused aspect of gender relations. There is no necessary connection between studying sexuality and anti-modernism/postmodernism or studying gender and modernism. Sexuality is a fundamental material aspect of the reproduction of patriarchies and patriarchal relations. The social (re)production of sexuality is a major, but not of course the only, element in the formation of the gendered body. Likewise, sexuality constitutes one of the (many) effects of the body. The body is a material foundation, a social formation and a site of social effects of patriarchies and patriarchal relations.

Having said that, we do argue that it is necessary to understand organisations, or at least most organisations, as *sexuated*. This is for several reasons:

- Sexual arrangements in the private domains provide the base infrastructure, principally through women's unpaid labour, for the public domain organisations.
- In many organisations the concept of sexual work is useful in analysis. Rather than seeing work as something that can then be sexualised, we argue that a much closer relationship between work and sexuality is possible. This entails the very definitions of sexuality and work. In some contexts sexuality in organisations is a form of work. Organisations can be seen as arenas of sexual labour, just as they are of emotional labour and other forms of labour.
- Linked closely to these debates is that more generally around the status of 'the economic' in the construction of sexuality and sexual harassment. 'Organisation sexuality' (Hearn & Parkin, 1987, 1995) is not a specific product of capitalist labour processes, though they are relevant.
- Most organisations continue to exist through dominant heterosexual norms, ideology, ethics and practices.
- The interrelations of gender and sexuality, as intimately, indeed definitionally, connected

with each other. Gender occurs *along with* sexuality, and vice versa. It is rather difficult to conceive of gender and sexuality without the other: 'without a concept of gender there could be, quite simply, no concept of homo- or hetero-sexuality.' Segdwick (1991: 31).

- Empirical distinctions between sexual and gender dynamics in organisations, for example, the presence/absence of members with different sexualities. In Sarah Rutherford's (1999) study of an airline company the presence of gay men in some of the organisation's divisions appeared to have clear impacts on the reduction of a harassing culture there.

To argue that organisations are sexualised is not to say that sexuality is predominant.

### *The critique of violence and violation*

Violence has not been a central concern of mainstream organisation theory. The recognition of the importance of gender and sexuality in organisations has provided groundwork for analysing violence in organisations and organisations through the perspective of violence. In this, feminist theory and practice on gender, sexuality and violence, in and outside organisations, have been central. The link between gender, sexuality and violence is most obvious with the recognition of sexual harassment, sexual violence and sexual abuse in and by organisations. Sexual harassment studies demonstrate both the power of male heterosexuality and men's violence in organisations. The complexities of interrelations of sexuality, violence and organisations remain relatively underexplored (see, for example, Hanmer et al., 1994; Hearn, 1994; Itzin, 1995; Collinson & Collinson, 1996).

Our focus on organisations through violence is not only because of the recognition of sexual harassment as a form of (sexual) violence but because feminist work more generally, particularly on sexuality, has increasingly acknowledged the underlying importance of men's violence. The overlap between sexual harassment and 'normal' heterosexual relations has been highlighted (Thomas & Kitzinger, 1994). Forms of sexuality, especially men's heterosexuality, not usually constructed as sexual harassment or sexual violence, may be understood in terms of their relationship to or reconstruction as sexual violence (Dworkin, 1979; MacKinnon, 1983). Hierarchy and dominance, in organisations as elsewhere, have been explored as subject to eroticisation, for many men at least (see Litewka, 1977; Coveney et al., 1984; Buchbinder, 1987; Frank, 1987; Kelly, 1988). Domination by men is clearly and characteristically associated with violence. Homicide and most other violence is primarily perpetrated by men. While men's collective, institutional, and interpersonal domination of violence is immense, it is important to also recognise women's and indeed children's violence. An emphasis on violence as a fundamental part of the gendered analysis of society is part of feminist theory and practice. Opposition to men's violence is a major personal and political focus within feminism. For men to be profeminist necessitates direct attention to men's power and violence. Men's violence is a major element in the perpetuation of that power and a necessary object of analysis and intervention in feminist and profeminist theory and practice.

Violence is an especially complex and contested term. This is clear from an historical analy-

sis of the changing recognition of what counts as (forms of) violence. The use of the term 'violence' also usually implies recognition that a problem exists: that something is seen as unacceptable or threatening, and that the actions and practices labelled as 'violent' have at least some characteristics in common with others similarly labelled. In this sense, it is a concept with shifting moral referents. Violence in and around work organisations is an area of analysis that is especially complex and contested. Indeed contestations over the definitions (in particular what is included and excluded) are especially intense in the case of violence, and are central in the social construction, social experience and social reproduction of violence in and around organisations. Debates and dilemmas around the definition of violence include those on: intention to harm; extent of physical contact; harmful effects and damage; differential perceptions, for example, of violator and violated; and interpersonal and structural violence.

Definitions of violence can vary greatly. Let us consider three possibilities. First violence is often equated with *physical violence*, or certain kinds of violence that are seen as 'serious' (Hearn, 1998b). This can apply in everyday definitions, especially of those being violent, and in official definitions. In criminal law this generally means the 'unjustified' use of physical force.

A second alternative, particularly relevant in organisational contexts, is to expand 'violence' to include harassment and bullying. This view brings together debates on different forms of violence that are usually kept separate. Violence then includes sexual, racial and other harassments (unwanted, persistent physical or verbal behaviour of a sexual/racial nature); and bullying (exposure repeatedly and over time to negative actions from one or more persons such that the victim has difficulties defending themselves, as well as physical violence. Harassment can be seen as 'repeated and persistent attempts by one person to torment, wear down, frustrate or get a reaction from another' (Bast-Petterson, 1995: 50). Bullying includes isolation (people refusing to listen to you, people refusing to talk to you), slander (gossip behind your back, spreading false and groundless information), negative glances and gestures, laughing, sneering (Björkqvist et al., 1994; Vartia, 1995).

A third way is to adopt a broad, socially contextualised understanding of violence as violation. Accordingly, we define violence as those structures, actions, events and experiences that violate or cause violation or are considered as violating. They are usually, but not necessarily, performed by a violator or violators upon the violated. Violence can thus be seen as much more than physical violence, harassment and bullying. It can also include intimidation, interrogation, surveillance, persecution, subjugation, discrimination and exclusion that lead to experiences of violation. This is close to what Judith Bessant (1998) calls 'opaque violence'. As she comments, 'In relationships where significant long-term power disparities exist, then inequality can easily slip into violence. This occurs regularly in workplaces as well as many other institutions.' (p. 9). This raises the question of how violence and violation relate to broad questions of oppression, inequality and (gender and other forms of) equity. For example, Iris Marion Young (1990) has explicated a plural categorisation of oppression: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. In contrast, Nancy Fraser (1997: 44-49) has outlined a concept of gender equity that encompasses a plurality of seven distinct normative principles: antipoverty, antiexploitation,

income equality, leisure-time equality, equality of respect, antimarginalisation, and antiandrocen-trism.

Violations, including oppressions and discriminations, are likely to have negative effects on physical and mental health and well-being. The negative health effects of violations, oppressions and discriminations are being increasingly recognised, though still relatively unexplored<sup>2</sup>. Violence and violation are social phenomena. Violation usually, though not always, includes some kind of *force* or *potential force*: force by the violator; forced violation of the violated. Violence as violation includes structured oppression; harassment, bullying and violence; and mundane, everyday viola-tions within organisational worlds. Dominant forms of violence as violation in organisations are by men to women, children or other men. They range across verbal, emotional, psychological, cogni-tive, representational and visual attacks, threats and degradation; enactment of psychological harm; physical assaults; use of weapons and other objects; destruction of property; rape; and murder. These distinctions may in practice break down, as in the understanding of all forms of violence from men to women as sexual violence (Kelly, 1987).

There are also several standpoints from which to define violence as violation: the violator; the violated; those of other social actors involved in dealing with violence; for example, lawmakers or enforcers; and those of analysts, who may or may not be involved in such intervention. In some situations the position, observation and sometimes relatively passive participation of audiences is especially important. These perspectives are, however, not always distinct; someone may occupy all locations simultaneously. All are mediated through representations and perceptions, usually dif-ferently for violators and violated, men and women. Violence involves violation; but violation is a broader, more useful concept for our purposes. This focus on violation has important methodologi-cal significance. Just as sexuality is not a fixed thing or even simply a set of acts, but a process of desiring, so similarly, a focus on violation refers to a process of damaging. These processes invol-ve the desiring or damaging event, and responses to desire/damage, and are, moreover, embodied, material and discursive.

Violence and violation figure in relation to organisations in many ways. The developing focus on organisations through sexual/gendered violence and violation comes from a number of directions – from harassment studies; from feminist work on men’s violence as a major element of men’s social power; from work on violence by organisations, on bullying and physical violence in organisations, and on organisational responses to violence, usually men’s, violence. Organisations can be seen as sites or structures of violence and violation, and be understood as constellations of violent/violating, potentially or threatened violent/violating actions, behaviours, intentions and experiences.

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<sup>2</sup> Landrine and Klonoff (1997) suggest that it is the presence and exposure to sexist acts rather than women’s subjective appraisals of those acts which is the best predictor of women’s negative symptoms. Krieger and Sidney (1996) from a survey of 4,000 black and white young adults in the US reports that blood pressure was highest for working-class black adults who accepted discrimination as «a fact of life» or who denied they experienced discrimination. It was lower for people who chal-lenged unfair treatment. Feagin and Sikes (1994) report relatively high levels of hypertension, angina and gastrointestinal ail-ments for black workers.

Violence and violation can be more or less institutionalised in particular organisations, and even of whole societies, such as the Third Reich. Violation may include the creation of the conditions of violence, whether social structurally or when someone's presence is violating. Violation can be dramatic or subtle, occasional or continuous, chronic and endemic (as in slave workplaces), generally invisible and 'unnecessary' (as inequalities are so entrenched), normalised and naturalised (as in the acceptance of sexual harassment as part of some jobs), an indication of changing power relations (perhaps through challenging previous power relations) or a reassertion of power by dominant groups (as in men's responses to women's power). Violence and violations in and around organisations can be ways of reinforcing relations of domination and subordination; of developing resistance; of refining gradations of status and power; and facilitating alliances, coalitions, inclusions, exclusions and scapegoating (Gabriel, 1998). Violences and violations can in turn be ways of maintaining subtexts and multiple oppressions in particular organisations, in organisation and in society more generally. However, it should also be emphasised that violence and violations are not simply means for or structurings of *other* forms of power, domination and oppression. They are forms of power, domination and oppression in themselves that structure organisations. While such a perspective can mean that violence as violation may blur into power relations, a key distinction is that power relations are not necessarily violating. The very existence of organisations can also be violating. The notion of the violating organisation may challenge that of the gendered organisation.

*The critique of 'diversity' and multiple social divisions*

The critical edge of organisational analysis has appeared to move from *agendered* approaches, to those implicitly *incorporating* gender and sexuality, to those recognising *social divisions* (of which gender is one example), onto the *more explicit recognition* of first gender and gender relations, then sexuality, and now violence and violation. Such a 'progression' is not a narrowing of focus in organisational analysis but a series of theoretical repositionings. Assumptions that agendered approaches are broader than gendered approaches, and gender relations are broader than sexuality or violence, carry with them hierarchical assumptions on reality that place concepts before experience. The account presented may appear to chart some movement from gender to sexuality to violence and violation, a kind of reverse modernism, in which progressively more fundamental 'forces' are noted, recognised, made conscious, interpreted and critiqued. It may appear as linear, yet it is not. Our work has, in some senses, shifted in these directions, but of course gender, sexuality, violence and violation have always been present. Consciousness of social processes may change in the analysis and transformation of organisations.

It is inaccurate to portray 'gender' or 'sexuality' as strictly separate from each other. 'Gender' is formed in relation to 'sexuality'; it is neither determinate nor derivative of sexuality. Gender occurs *along with* sexuality, and vice versa; it is difficult to conceive of gender and sexuality without the other, even if in some instances the cultural context of sexuality or gender seems absent. Thus it might be more appropriate to talk of the gender-sexuality relation than 'gender and

sexuality' or 'gender, sexuality and violence'. We could continue this logic, creating further complexes around gender-sexuality-race, gender-sexuality-class, or amalgamations of four or more conceptual divisions. However, while all the permutations of gender, sexuality, race, class, age, disability (amongst other social divisions) are important, there is a special significance in certain associations, at least in certain social contexts. Why is this? With the difficulty of conceiving gender without (a)sexuality, and sexuality without (a)gender, these two notions generally depend for their existence upon the other through the reference to the socially sexed body. On the other hand, most other social divisions, while probably interconnected with gender and sexuality, may not always depend upon gender and sexuality for their cultural existence. While gender and sexuality can be deployed in ways similar to the use of such social divisions as class and race, we need to be aware of how the relation of gender and sexuality is qualitatively different to that of, say, gender and class, or gender and race (Bondi, 1998: 186). In this kind of society at least, violence is clearly very closely intertwined with gender and sexuality.

This means not looking at *separate* questions such as 'gender' or 'sexuality' (Savage & Witz, 1992) or 'gender and violence', but understanding relations of oppressions in the social processes of organisations. What organisations are and what is taken to happen in most work organisations is *fundamentally constituted* in the interrelations of gender, sexuality, violation and other oppressions, divisions and differences. Organisations and what happens in them are fundamentally social, formed through various social relations, of which gender, sexuality and violation are the prime focuses here. We thus address the interconnections of violation, gender, sexuality and organisations – what might be called 'the gender-sexuality-violation complex'. There is an urgent need to examine gendered/sexuated violations in and around organisations. This is more than a listing of 'events'; rather charting interconnections is part of the process of theorising and developing theory. Generally, violence and violation are very closely linked with, but not totally determined by, structural power differences. While our focus is on gender and sexuality, it is important not to privilege sexuality and gender over other divisions and oppressions, such as race and racism. Though gender and sexuality seem to be persistently significant in the explanation of violation, particular violations are mediated through other social divisions, such as age and class. The incredible variety of cultural formations and structuring of practices called organisations can itself often be violating to some; the very (re)production of organisation(s) can be a form of violence and violation.

### **Towards a more complex, more critical concept of the gendered organisation**

In addition to these various substantive critiques, there are a number of further major avenues of methodological, and indeed epistemological and ontological, critique. These partly concern the status of the category of gender, for example, not pre-judging what gender is or could be, and not assuming gender is all-determining. The relation of the gendered and the non-gendered is thus now much more open-ended than was assumed to be the case, say, twenty years ago. More

generally still, there are the impacts of critiques around indeterminacy and anti-foundationalism. In terms of 'the gendered organisation' this might be translated as: the relation of postmodernism and patriarchies (Hearn, 1992). In such models ambiguity, contradiction and paradox are embedded and inherent.

In developing a more complex and more critical concept of the gendered organisation, we can also ask: 'What are the questions that we do not ask?' There are several contenders here. There is still an avoidance of men and men's power in analysing the gendered organisation. There is probably also much more to be done in analysing women's relations with each other; and indeed women's power. Another set of issues concern the impact of one gendered element upon other gendered elements. This would suggest a multi-dimensional concept of the gendered organisation.

Finally, there is the persistent question of how do liberatory, progressive and egalitarian feminist and profeminist gender politics work in specific organisational contexts – economically, politically, administratively, practically? This is an ongoing question that is likely to inform a more complex and more diverse concept of the gendered organisation, empirically, epistemologically, and indeed politically.

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**Resumo.** Neste artigo revemos os aspectos básicos da organização sexuada. Todos os investigadores do género sexual e diversidade têm provavelmente uma noção, ainda que implícita, sobre a organização sexuada. Isto aplica-se quer a investigações empíricas quer às análises genéricas mais teóricas das organizações e da gestão. O nosso objectivo é tornar explícitos tais pressupostos assim como lançar um olhar crítico à forma como concebemos e conceptualizamos «a organização sexuada», e ainda aos pressupostos subjacentes ao nosso próprio trabalho.

A discussão está organizada em duas partes. Em primeiro lugar, examinamos o conceito de *organização sexuada*, descrevendo a sua história e alguns dos pressupostos básicos sobre a organização sexuada, e revendo algumas questões recorrentes no estudo do tópico. A Segunda parte apresenta uma *crítica positiva* do conceito de organização sexuada. Esta crítica positiva envolve a re-avaliação de vários elementos chave: o próprio conceito de 'organização'; o conceito de 'género sexual'; a relação entre género e sexualidade; as relações entre género, sexualidade, violência e violação; a intersecção do género com outras divisões sociais; e também algumas críticas metodológicas. Esta revisão crítica é necessária para o desenvolvimento empírico e conceptual do género sexual e diversidade no ambiente de trabalho e nas organizações de forma mais genérica.

*Palavras-chave:* Género sexual, organizações, sexualidade, violência, crítica.