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Gendering the silences: psychoanalysis, gender and organization studies

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Abstract *By the very nature of its concerns (i.e. a search for deep-seated meanings within our understandings of organizations and the people who enact them), psychoanalysis has much to offer management practice in the twenty-first century. We contend that, given its focus, the growing concerns with the dynamics of gender at work places a particular burden on psychoanalysis. Drawing on insights from debates within feminist psychoanalysis, we suggest a strategy for applying psychoanalysis that is capable of dealing with the gendered aspects of organizational dynamics.*

Introduction

Psychoanalysis has much to offer management practice by way of insights into the deep-rooted nature of workplace behaviours. However, we contend that the utility of psychoanalysis and its ability to make a sustained contribution to the field of organizational analysis will depend in some measure on how well it is able to deal with the issue of gender.

Over the past 25 years mainstream organizational analysis has responded to the growing critique of the neglect of gender (Mills and Tancred, 1992), incorporating numerous gendered insights and concerns. The current popularity of "diversity management" is but one prominent example of this trend. Whereas postmodernist approaches to management and organization studies have been able to deal with gender issues in a seamless flow from theory to application (Calás and Smircich, 1996), psychoanalysis appears mired in theoretical foundations that are viewed as profoundly gendered (Weedon, 1993). Nonetheless, a considerable body of feminist psychoanalysis provides insights into a gender approach to psychoanalysis at work. Drawing on those insights we suggest a strategy for developing psychoanalytical approaches capable of unravelling the nature of management and organization in all their gendered layers.

Organizational analysis and psychoanalysis in the twenty-first century

Organizational analysis has its roots in the search for organizational efficiency and developed within a scientific framework which encourages study of the rational and objectivist aspects of organizational reality at the expense of the non-rational and subjectivist aspects (Corman and Poole, 2000). One result has been the neglect of such things as emotionality, sensemaking, symbolism,



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personality, and the individual. As the "individual" has begun to disappear from organizational analysis (Nord and Fox, 1996), the notion of the rational, or "normal" organizational member has taken centre stage, i.e. much of organizational behaviour and theory is premised on the idea that employees have little or no "psychological baggage", only different levels of ability, psychological preparedness and commitment.

Over the last three decades various alternative approaches to and within mainstream organizational analysis have questioned the viability of ignoring or downplaying the deep-seated aspects of an individual's psychological make-up. Weick (1995), for example, has drawn attention to the role of sensemaking in the construction of organization and its outcomes. Morgan (1986), drawing on psychoanalytical theory, has argued that unquestioned dominant organizational ideas can stifle creativity and individuality as employees become trapped in a "psychic prison" of their own making. Similarly, Hochschild's (1983) work has highlighted the role of emotion labour in the demise of employee sense of self, and, Collinson and Hearn (1994) and Calás and Smircich (1996) have, respectively, exposed the role of men/masculinity, women/femininity in the social construction of organizational realities. Cutting across the different paradigmatic divides, the organizational culture debate in the 1980s opened up discussion of the non-rational aspects of organizational arrangements (Smircich, 1983). Despite a return to more structural solutions to organizational change (e.g. TQM, BRP, etc.), concerns with the deep-rooted "cultural" aspects of the organizational experience continue to be explored (Martin, 2002).

The essence of this philosophical debate was also reproduced in an exchange between Jaques (1995a, b) and Amado (1995). Jaques asserted that a psychoanalytical approach to organizational analysis focuses on symptom-like issues that serve only to obfuscate the structural deficiencies of poorly designed organizations. He therefore suggests that research should be strictly focused on the development of better organizational systems and structures. Amado, on the other hand, defended the use of psychoanalysis by placing the complex experiences of the individual at the center of the problem. He argues that no single, universal model representing the ideal organizational design will ever fully eliminate the dysfunctionalities and resulting challenges that are bound to arise when groups of individuals work together.

While the two approaches to organizational analysis appear unlikely to converge in the near future, it is our contention that the approaches are not entirely in opposition. A considerable amount of future research effort may very well be directed towards the pursuit of improved organizational structure/design (i.e. for management purposes). At the same time however, we believe that increasing numbers of critical scholars will choose to focus on the attainment of insights that will allow us to better understand, describe and ultimately improve the human experience within the organizations that have been created. Ultimately, these two approaches will inform one another. It is in

this light that we see psychoanalysis as a practice that appears to have much to offer organizational analysis in the twenty-first century.

From the Frankfurt School to the present, psychoanalytical theories of organization have studied both the impact of organizational arrangements on the individual and the impact of the individual on the organization. In essence, psychological dynamics within the organization inform organizational realities and, as a result, psychoanalysis gives us an important theoretical framework to help us understand and explain those dynamics.

Psychoanalysis helps to reveal processes which occur within every individual and which determine how each person will act. It shows how psychological pressure, especially anxiety can neutralize productive effort and drain away human energy. It shows the ways in which people affect and relate to each other in groups, and the ways in which leaders are created. It shows some of the basic causes of problems, which are likely to occur in organizations . . . (De Board, 1978, p. 2).

Researchers have used psychoanalysis to generate unique insights on scores of topics and the level of analysis takes us far closer to the individuals within the organization. This is in stark contrast to the type of research that explores a "system of interconnected roles" such as those found in the "requisite organization" (Jaques, 1989).

Psychoanalysis and gender

What is most striking about the most recent body of psychoanalytical research literature in organizational analysis is that, at best, it is "gender-blind", and, at its worst, it reproduces notions of the organization as masculine. For example, in the De Board quote above it is assumed that gendered experiences play little or no role in the way that people relate to one another in groups or provide leadership. This is an example of a gender-blind approach; numerous studies of group dynamics and leadership have suggested that gender plays a significant role (cf. Hearn and Parkin, 1991). In the following quote, Walter (1983, p. 259) provides us with a vision of the organization that naturalizes masculinity. Focused on "modern organizational inhabitants", discussion about "the symbolism of success" centres on masculinity, with femininity discussed unproblematically as an adjunct to the "male" psyche:

A graciously and perhaps even sumptuously decorated office reception of a company communicates opulence and self-assurance . . . So too does the presence of a comely lady receptionist. These individuals are clearly not of goddess stature but are reminiscent of the nymphs who served as handmaidens to mythological gods in a variety of ways.

To be clear, by "gender" we are drawing on Oakley's (1972) distinction between sex (as biological differences) and gender (as socially constructed notions of being male and being female that become associated with sex differences). Thus, in terms of management practice there is an important distinction to be made between hiring and promotion practices based on biological differences and the way that management practices contribute to gendered assumptions about people based on biological differences. The two are, of course, inter-related. In the first case it is important for purposes of employment equity to

ensure that people are not discriminated against because of assumed biological difference. This leads us to talk in terms of "men" and "women" and their relative numbers within the organization. The problem comes where we begin to attribute certain fixed characteristics to the categories of "women" and "men" and act as if those categories are real. In this case, any good that comes from an equitable hiring policy can be lost by reifying so-called female and male characteristics (Calás and Smircich, 1996).

Within psychoanalytical accounts of organizations gender is a topic that is rarely addressed. For instance, in a review of more than one hundred research articles in the field spanning the past decade, we found ourselves immersed in a world where differentiated notions of gender do not exist. There are many references to male leaders and male managers yet masculinity and femininity are not mentioned and there are little if any references to female organizational members. In sum, the body of literature provides insights that greatly contribute to our understanding of organizational behaviour. However, the theory typically essentializes gender differences through a focus on explanation of the behaviour characteristic of "men" within organizations. When referring to employees, authors typically make perfunctory, politically correct references to both sexes (i.e. "his or her") but meaningful distinctions of gender and the impact of gender in the workplace are not addressed. Most of the analyses simply assume that all employees can be neatly folded into the same psychoanalytic concept or metaphor (i.e. irrespective of gender). We are left to assume that "men" and "women" are interchangeable as generic employees in organizations that do not or will not have any difficulties or issues that revolve around gender.

The main difficulty with the stance of gender-neutrality that is taken in most psychoanalytic approaches to organizational studies is that it actually manifests itself as a projection of male-associated gender-bias. To take the example of narcissism, Lasch (1979), describes narcissism as a phenomenon:

... in which individuals, fixated by early separation trauma, (a) are driven by unrealistic images of perfection ... and (b) adopt grandiose patterns of behaviour to impress and manipulate others (Walter, 1983, p. 261).

Brown (1997) explains that narcissism is based on the notion that individuals have a need to maintain a positive sense of self, and that they engage in ego-defensive behaviour in order to preserve self-esteem. He notes that the extent to which narcissistic behaviour exists in individuals spans a continuum and then he interconnects various types of reward, ego defences, and self-esteem to legitimacy attributions as a means to create hypotheses that will improve managerial practices. The problem with this approach is that Brown (1997) uses narcissism to characterize organizational behaviour and then to create recommendations that are to be applied universally across an organization. It is argued here that the basis for these assertions relies on characteristics that are more predominantly exhibited by males. Feminist psychoanalysis suggests that – due to socio-psychological pressures on the process of mothering in

Western culture – females are far less likely to experience “early separation trauma”. On the contrary, it is contended that females are more likely to have a “continuing ambivalent tie to the mother . . . and cannot so thoroughly repress her . . . relational capacities” (Flax, 1990, p. 123). Boys, on the other hand, deal with the separation-individuation process through denial, projection, and by domination. Thus, the “ability to control and be in control becomes both a need and a symbol of masculinity” (Flax, 1990, p. 123). Given the masculine dominance of organizational life the potential and proclivity to “impress and manipulate others” is, thus, more likely to characterise male rather than female employees and power holders (Collinson and Hearn, 1994)

Like many aspects of psychoanalytical theory, narcissism has been critiqued as a Freudian concept that fails to adequately capture the female psyche (Kofman, 1985). These debated inadequacies are simply not discussed in this work. Even if narcissism is accepted as a construct that can be applied universally, there are clearly gender differences that should be acknowledged in this type of analysis. Tschanz (1998) used the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin and Hall, 1979) to explore these differences and found that exploitive tendencies and open displays of feelings of entitlement are far less integral to narcissism for females than for males. Given that these are key aspects of the narcissism construct, gender differences will have a direct impact on individual needs and on cross-gender relations within any organization. The implications of these differences are therefore significant for any analysis that purports to look at the dynamics of group and organizational behaviour. So, it is therefore a critical and, in many ways, classical mistake to assume that these interconnections represent the universal needs of employees within organizations.

One could argue that narcissism is only a single construct within the field of psychoanalysis; however, this same sort of gender critique can be launched against almost all this literature. Far too many applications of psychoanalytical theory to the workplace simply ignore the issue of gender. Yet, we know that the workplace is contested terrain that has played an important role in the generation and proliferation of a historically male-dominant discourse. Feminist studies of organizational leadership, for example, indicate that the archetypal leader is almost always based on male-associated characteristics such as competitiveness, toughness, aggression, objectivity, lack of emotionality, etc. (Sinclair, 1998). The issue of gender is central to the workplace dynamic so a gender-neutral approach is an oversimplification of a complex issue that ultimately projects and replicates traditional forms of male-dominance and male gender-bias (Hearn and Parkin, 1983). Innumerable organizational studies have revealed the gendered character of seemingly gender-neutral processes such as structure (cf. Kanter, 1977), strategy (cf. Morgan and Knights, 1991), communication (cf. Borisoff and Merrill, 1985), perception (Mills and Wilson, 2001), organizational culture (Morgan, 1988), and sensemaking (Helms Mills and Mills, 2000). Assertions and recommendations

made on this basis are destined to perpetuate existing norms of male-dominance within organizations.

Psychoanalysis, gender and management practice

Standard accounts of management contend that understanding human behaviour is the key to successful organizational outcomes (Schein, 1985). Typical studies of organizational behaviour include a focus on such things as motivation, perception, power and politics, leadership, etc. While these areas of interest are useful for understanding how people react within the constraints of organizations they are often rooted in ahistorical assumptions that leave out of the account the psychological histories of the individuals that constitute a particular organization. Here psychoanalysis can play a vital role by providing a framework for understanding identity as an ongoing process rooted in psychological experience. Kets de Vries (1996), for example, uses a psychoanalytic approach to leadership that suggests that it is not simply the context in which "good" or "bad" leadership is expressed but also the particular psychological histories of selected leaders that shape organizational dynamics.

Many of the key concepts of psychoanalysis and their usefulness for managers are explored in other articles within this edition. Here we want to explore the usefulness of psychoanalysis for understanding the gendered dynamics of organizational life.

The first point we would make is that gender is about men as well as women, masculinities as well as femininities. As Collinson and Hearn (1994) have strongly argued, men and masculinity have so often been taken for granted, "normal", unquestioned aspects of organizational life. Yet, they continue, to understand why some activities and processes are valued over others we need to know something of the dominant forms of masculinity in play. For example, certain organizations may encourage aggressive, highly competitive behaviour from employees and leaders (e.g. the military) while others may encourage quiet, restrained behaviour (e.g. a monastic order). The root of these behaviours may lie not only in the character of the organization but in the masculine personas of those in charge. A psychoanalytic lens can help practicing managers to understand something of the psychological processes that inform their own and other people's notion of masculinity and its role in organization. The work of Christopher Lasch (1979) provides a useful example. Lasch (1979, pp. 91-2) contends that the very nature of the capitalist organization encourages narcissism:

For all his inner suffering, the narcissist has many traits that make for success in bureaucratic institutions, which put a premium on the manipulation of interpersonal relations, discourage the formation of deep personal attachments, and at the same time provide the narcissist with the approval he needs in order to validate his self esteem.

Narcissistic organizational culture encourages the type of leader who:

... sees the world as a mirror of himself and has no interest in external events except as they throw back a reflection of his own image (Lasch, 1979, p. 96).

It would appear that the message here for practicing managers is to carefully examine cultural processes to minimize the encouragement of virulent forms of narcissism.

The second point we would make is that gender is relational. Nancy Chodorow (1987, p. 250) expresses it thus:

Gender difference is not absolute, abstract, or irreducible; it does not involve an essence of gender. Gender differences, and the experience of difference, are socially and psychologically created and situated just as are differences among women. Difference and gender difference do not exist as things in themselves: they are created relationally, and we cannot understand difference apart from this relational construction.

Whatever forms of masculine (and feminine) behaviours we encourage will contribute to how male and female employees see and value themselves. Livingstone and Luxton's (1989) study of Canadian steelworkers, for example, indicated that an emphasis on toughness, danger and aggression had implications for men and women. For many of the men this form of masculinity and steelworking were conflated in a sense of identity – to be a steelworker was to be a certain type of man. These associations served to exclude women from steelworking. When, under equity pressures, steelworking was opened up to female employees a number of men experienced identity crisis.

Understanding differences between the experiences of being male and the experiences of being female should not be understood as a comparison between the essential differences between men and women. Rather it should be a guide to how we come to construct notions of men and women within our organizations and what the implications are. For example, it may be that management which to promote more females to positions of authority yet find sufficiently few within the company ranks with the inclination or confidence to take on the challenge. The answer is not simply to promote more women – although that might help for a start, but rather to identify and address the root of the problem. Feminist organizational analysts have provided clues to the structural problems that discourage women (cf. Kanter, 1977). Feminist psychoanalysts provide clues to the psychological processes that shape the female worldview. As Chodorow (1987, p. 251) explains it:

Psychoanalysis, by providing a history of the emergence of separateness, differentiation, and perceptions of difference in early childhood, clarifies many of the issues involved in questions of difference. It provides a particularly useful means to see the relational and situated construction of difference and gender difference.

The rich body of knowledge and insight generated from the feminist psychoanalytic perspective, although not without its feminist detractors (see for example Rossi, 1987) enables us to appreciate that female experiences must be understood as being distinct from male experiences, and the potential implications for both males and females in the workplace.

Nancy Chodorow's work dealing with the development of feminine identity is an example of a feminist psychoanalytic perspective that may provide valuable insight into the formation of women's identity in the workplace.

Chodorow (1989) discusses the development of feminine identity in Western societies and explains that identity is developed through female socialization. Mothers raise female children to perform traditionally feminine roles (e.g. child rearing) and “for a personality stressing passivity, compliance, and goodness” (Chodorow, 1989, p. 41). Females become aware that feminine identity is devalued in society and eventually come to accept this position. Horney (1967, p. 69) suggests that “flight from womanhood” occurs as the girl develops and learns more about the oppressive environment around her. Horney argued that females are motivated for “flight into the male role” and that the flight from womanhood is “not a flight from uncertainty about feminine identity but from knowledge about it”. Chodorow also discusses the effects of the child-mother relationship on the development of both females and males. She argues that child rearing and “female or male role training” produce differences in the way females and males handle developmental issues such as dependency and individuation. Applegarth (1976) argues that while the development of the superego is similar in boys and girls the content is often different, with female superegos more often valuing responsiveness to the wishes and opinions of others. Gilligan (1982) argues that females may develop a strong sense of moral values and ego ideals that differ from males in their orientation to relationship rather than abstract ideals. These notions should not, however, be viewed as fixed, essential positions but rather insights into processes that may be alleviated or exacerbated by workplace practices. For example, in terms of the impact of social context on female socialization, we:

... need to raise the question of whether and how the past [two decades or so] of important sociocultural changes have influenced the dynamics of [female] development (Chehrazi, 1987, p. 26).

Feminist psychoanalytical research provides numerous insights for management by raising a number of questions, including issues of leadership, corporate morality, service, and initiative. We are challenged to consider such constructs as narcissism, mirroring, moral development, individuation-separation, and superego development. What, for example, is the impact of narcissism on leadership and corporate responsibility? How can it be identified and managed? To what extent do the male and female members of a specific organization differ in terms of narcissistic behaviour and what implications does this have, not only for the organization but for the people involved? To what extent does an organization undervalue behavior centered on relationships and concern with others and what are the implications? To what extent is manipulation of people and power plays overvalued within an organizational culture? Do organizational leaders tend to act as if certain qualities are essentially feminine (e.g. emotionality) and others essentially masculine (e.g. objectivity) and what impact does this have on all involved?

We cannot pretend that these are questions with easy, uncontested answers. Jorstad (1991), for example, asserts that narcissistic leaders should be replaced by a search for complete human beings who exhibit more qualities that are

looked upon as being female. Jacobson (1995), on the other hand, suggests that psychic wholeness is needed and that individuals must integrate the masculine and the feminine to achieve this ideal. Yet other feminists counsel against essentializing certain attributes as "feminine" or "masculine" (cf. Rakow, 1986). Linstead (1997) addresses the issue through reference to male-dominance within organizations, arguing that emotional denial is part of social and organizational life for men and can produce narcissistic and addictive responses. Similarly, Reciniello (1999) looks at male-dominance in organizations, presenting us with a fascinating discussion on the experiences of women in organizations dominated by men and male-dominant culture (see also Bradshaw and Newell (1993) who use Jungian dream analysis to reveal the character of the problem for individual women). Despite the differences in the perspectives of these authors there is a unity of thought in this body of research insofar as it all suggests that we cannot ignore gender in analysis of organizational dynamics. However, these pieces of research represent only a budding acknowledgement that gender is a key consideration that must be represented in the psychoanalysis of organizations.

This logic should resonate with authors in this field when it is juxtaposed against the work of Kets de Vries and Miller (1987). They argue that we must be able to discern hidden meanings and "texts" within the organization. They emphasize the importance of revealing the meanings and motives that lie behind organizational decisions and social behaviour and the importance of viewing the text in context. This approach is seen to be key to decoding these texts and for the development of an ultimate understanding of the true dynamics of the organization. Therefore analysts should readily appreciate the importance of recognizing and highlighting the issue of gender. Given the historical constructions of male-dominance within most organizations, notions of gender difference and gender construction are obviously central to the context within which the "text" of most organizations resides.

The work of Chodorow, Horney and other feminist psychoanalytic theorists has provided a useful and gendered perspective regarding the development of female and male sense of self and identity. Feminist theory has also gained valuable insight from the psychoanalytical standpoint. For example, the psychoanalytic approach to organizational analysis is a style that feminist theorists have taken advantage of in order to re-analyze male interpretations from a woman's point of view. Traditionally, however, psychoanalysis has been described as being an approach that only enables one to understand the development of men rather than women (Horney, 1967). Moreover, from a feminist perspective, it may initially seem as though feminism and psychoanalysis are two greatly opposing theories due to the exclusion of women and insights into their development. However Mahfouz and Smith (1994, p. 9) would disagree:

Whether we think that the two fields are undermining, challenging, or nurturing each other, we need to use other fields of knowledge to shed more light upon their different perspectives and to further our understanding. Psychoanalysis has provided us with a theory, a

methodology, and a clinical practice. It "helped us understand power in noninstitutional firms – how relations of domination become intertwined" (Flax, 1990, p. 16). Feminism, has also offered us a theory as well as an analysis of gender and plan of action. It has enabled us to deepen our thinking about power relations in a male dominated society. Finally, psychoanalytic feminism has enriched us with fresh looks from within the two fields in an attempt to integrate other fields of knowledge.

Although the relationships between feminism and psychoanalysis are complex and difficult to understand, what is clear is that feminist theorists have encountered significant theoretical issues with psychoanalysis. It has been strongly argued that the central concepts of psychoanalytic theory are highly gendered and women are viewed as inferior. For example, psychoanalysis provides a gendered view that narcissistic development is seen as being a result of maternal care (Flax, 1990). Feminist critics argue that Freud's theory was sexist, anti-woman, and he believed it to be obvious that a child would think the masculine genitalia were superior to the feminine (Chodorow, 1989). However, despite the many criticisms of Freudian theory, we agree with Flax (1990) who suggested that male bias should not be seen as a reason for dismissing the concepts and insights gained through psychoanalysis; rather, she suggests reworking the concepts from a feminist perspective is necessary. Furthermore, psychoanalytic theories may increase the awareness of female oppression and gender-based distortions. Aside from the fact that Freudian theory is biased, it describes how:

... women and men become gendered and sexed, how femininity and masculinity develop, and how sexual inequality is reproduced (Chodorow, 1989, p. 176).

It is the centrality of gender and sex that positions psychoanalysis as a valuable tool for feminist theorists.

The third and final point that we would make is that sexual orientation is a critical element of gender identity, which has important implications for workplace dynamics. This area of discussion is among the most fiercely contested terrain of psychoanalysis (cf. Chodorow, 1994). There are those who view heterosexuality as "normal" and homosexuality as "abnormal", an illness (cf. Socarides, 1987). Other psychoanalysts view heterosexuality and homosexuality as "similarly constructed and experienced compromise formations" (Chodorow, 1994, p. 34). If there is any agreement it is that:

Psychoanalysis enables us to understand how polymorphous, ambisexual children are transformed through social relations into specific gender identities and heterosexuality (Flax, 1990, p. 145).

The problem is that the workplace often values not only masculinity over femininity, but certain forms of masculinity over other forms, certain forms of femininity over other forms, and heterosexuality over homosexuality. This can result in situations of repression where employees who are either gay/lesbian or whose gender specific behaviour appears inappropriate feel forced to hide aspects of their identities (cf. Hall, 1989). The lessons are clear, that in so far as

managers create and support dominant forms of gender-specific expectations they are contributing to inequitable and angst-ridden environments.

In light of the useful insights psychoanalysis has contributed to feminist theory and vice versa, it is surprising that very little research has been conducted in which organizational behaviour is analyzed from a feminist psychoanalytic perspective (cf. Bradshaw and Newell, 1993). Psychoanalysis would be remarkably enriched through the inclusion of accounts of gender issues and experiences within an organizational setting. It is clear that psychoanalysis has only provided a male biased perspective of the development of identity, experiences, and sense of self. This perspective has been useful for gaining insights into male-associated behaviour in organizational settings (e.g. leadership and narcissism). However, in order for psychoanalysis to evolve and gain renewed interest among researchers, we argue that psychoanalytic theory must be re-examined from a gender perspective to allow for the experiences of women/men, masculinity/femininity, heterosexuality/homosexuality to be explored.

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