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OUTSIDERS AND INSIDERS; GENDER WORK IN BRITISH INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND TRADE UNION STUDIES

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INTRODUCTION

The study of industrial relations and trade unions has never been confined to the academy, whether among men or women. It is a political field in theory, in substantive content and in practice – praxis. Within the academy the role of IR is fluid and contingent on the prevailing political culture; sometimes inside, sometimes on the margins, sometimes outside. Central to the field of study is analysis of trade unions and labour movements and IR scholars are frequently closely associated with organised labour. Trade unions themselves are both inside and outside the ‘establishment’ mainstream, particularly in relation to the government in power, and the position of the IR academy is reflected in similar ways. This can be seen in the parallel rise and recent decline of power and voice of trade unions and the IR academy in Britain, and also in the intermittent critique of the subject itself [see Healy et al 2006: 291 for a summary] in which the two main trajectories have been a lack of theory, and the marginalisation of gender, both in analysis and of women working in the academic field. The gender deficit is mirrored within labour movements, and indeed much gender analysis has been in this area.

These parallels are the focus of this paper. I aim to trace the emergence of gender as an equality and diversity issue within trade unions, and as the basis of industrial relations research and analysis, arguing that its continuing marginalisation is bad for theory, policy and practice, and for the IR field of study. I also identify these with ‘gender work’ ie women [mainly] working in the field in both unions and the academy, and weaving these together, identify and discuss key themes. Some of these emerge from the field itself, and some, which are both similar and different, emerge from an empirical study I have been carrying out among women working in the field. I sent a questionnaire to 60 academic women working in IR and associated subjects in the UK and a range of countries, with a response rate of 37%. While this paper has a mainly British focus, some of the respondents to the questionnaire survey were from other countries, especially Anglophone countries, which share some of the features of the adversarial British IR system¹.

THE BRITISH MODEL OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

A world of work and conflict

Industrial relations and its study has been, and largely remains, confined to ‘the study of work and employment relationships in all their forms’, seeking to hold up a mirror to ‘what goes on in the world of work’ [BUIRA, 2008:1]. Its focus is seen as the regulation, control and ‘governance’ of work and the employment relationship. It is characterised as having breadth, which benefits from its interdisciplinarity [BUIRA 08:2]. Key features of the British

¹ In conversations with colleagues from elsewhere, for example, women European academics, it seems that in several, the academic field of industrial relations is not a separate discipline, which makes things even more difficult for those working specifically on IR and TU subjects.

model are its focus on class and class conflict and associated language such as 'struggle', 'fight', 'dispute', with its central concerns of collectivism, solidarity, and democracy. Especially significant is the political nature of the field, which arises from the ontological position of its actors and advocates and gives rise to claims for its focus on policy making and, less obviously visible but nevertheless a key aspect, its praxis and positionality.

Like its parliamentary system, the British model of IR is founded on the adversarial relations of class conflict, notwithstanding the range often found in textbooks, which extends from functionalist [Dunlop, Parsons et al] through to pluralist to radical [Fox 1973] and Marxist [Hyman 1975], for an overview, see for example Salamon 2000. The 1980s saw the 'HRM [Human Resource Management] turn', reflecting the rise of globalisation and neo-liberal politics, renaming IR departments and job titles into variations on Employee/ment Relations and HRM, as the discipline was recast into a unitary project and relocated into business schools. Those resisting this incorporation have seen themselves increasingly marginalised, with probably the most extreme example being the attack in 2008 by Keele University on its Centre for Industrial Relations, at the time the only IR unit left in the UK not in a business school [Beckett 2008]. As well as industrial relations responses including an international petition, this triggered an intense debate about *What Is the Point of Industrial Relations?* subsequently circulated as a British Universities Industrial Relations Association [BUIRA] statement [2008] and extended into a short edited book published in 2009. Of the 14 chapters [including the introduction] only one was solely woman-authored. This and the sociological chapter, each briefly addressed the 'neglect' of gender' [Dickens 2009:61] but did not carry out analysis of the issue. This paper aims to do just that.

The focus of the Statement and the Book was on why it is 'necessary to view the goals and interests involved in the employment relationship as... conflictual', going on to state that 'as a policy-oriented field of study it is concerned with multiple and competing goals' – efficiency and productivity, equity and voice, and workplace justice [BUIRA 2008 p2].

In this paper I am arguing that the ontology and epistemology of conflict in the IR academy and in practice, is intrinsic to the way in which gender analysis has developed in the field, together with the experience of women working in that particular area, and that both are intimately related with its exclusionary culture, a field which is structured as a male habitus [Bordieu 1977].

Previously, Fiona Colgan and myself have suggested that 'The history of creativity and innovation arising from challenge to, conflict with and deviance from hegemonic structures, systems and ideologies is long and celebrated. So it is within labour movements. Marginality is not merely a symptom of oppression, it is also a site of critique, creativity and a launching pad for challenge, change and transformation.... There seems to be an inverse relationship between the strength of exclusion and that of the response among women's and other equality seeking groups within trade unions. The more adversarial and exclusionary the IR experience, the more innovative and creative the response' [2002:22].

I would suggest that this also applies to the positionings of the [mainly] women who work in this field², not only in the UK, but in other Anglophone countries such as Australia, Canada and the USA, which share antagonistic class and employment relations as the central rallying point of their systems of IR, together too, with the liminal position of gender.

² In previous discussions with a Nordic colleague she characterised Scandinavian IR systems as cooperative, and similarly the gender generally approach there. In other discussions with colleagues from these countries, this cooperative, collective approach to equality has been seen as responsible for previously not permitting discussion and analysis about the absence of gender equality or proportionality within trade unions there – a gender-neutral solidaristic response which can exclude and punish those challenging it.

PUTTING GENDER IN. CONNECTIONS, CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

Whereas the main focus of traditional IR has been confined to the world of work and the employment relationship, key to feminist analysis of the second wave, and which impacts on this discussion, was the focus on the 'whole woman'³ – ie the antagonistic relations between production and reproduction, the private/public domains/divide, the personal is the political; 'the overall systemic oppression of women in their social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women' [Hartmann 1979:14]; patriarchy conceptualised as 'a system of interrelated social/gendered structures [or gender regimes] and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women and which exist in articulation with other social systems such as class, race and sexuality' [Walby, 1990, 1997:5-6].

Patriarchal analysis examined class analysis and found it wanting, moving on to demolish the mantra that when the working class was liberated, so would women be. Thinkers such as Michelle Barrett [1980] and Heidi Hartmann [1979] made it clear through dual systems analysis that patriarchy always trumped class, giving rise to further wrestling with and between these central and pivotal schools of thought – which were and remain more than just ideas. These are at the heart of the ontological and epistemological gender divide in both the study and practice of industrial relations.

In this paper I aim to braid together the three main strands involved; the industrial relations academy, trade unions, and gender and IR/TUs. I draw on the disciplines making up traditional IR while being centrally informed by women's studies, feminist analysis, and women's activism.

Feminism, feminisation and the academy

The 1960s and 70s saw a convergence [an articulation? to use an IR term] of feminism, feminisation of the workforce and of parts of the academy. The forces of Second wave feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement⁴ with its central activity of consciousness raising, and early women's studies programmes, came together with the rapid expansion of the numbers of women in the labour market and in trade unions - between 1964 and 1970 women accounted for 70% of the increase in members of TUC unions, making up a third of union members - the role and power of British trade unions, the popularity of the social sciences, especially sociology and later women's studies, as a fields of study. In all of these women's agency was key to challenge and change.

Trade union women's campaigning focused particularly on equal pay, especially following the Ford women workers' strike in 1968 which also became a rallying point for demands for legislation. The outcome was the 1970 Equal Pay Act, its architect was Barbara Castle MP. Although a bench mark and a crucial legal watershed, its limitations and shortcomings and the resilience of patriarchal resistance and the concept of the family wage, underpinned by systemic gendered power relations, have ensured that the gender pay gap continues to be a central and contested focus for unions, academic researchers, thinkers and policy makers. Gendered labour markets, and their close connections with the gender pay gap persist, and the interrelationship between oppression and subordination of women both at home and at work has been a key and fertile site of analysis and research with women in the vanguard of engaging with these debates. These can be framed most usefully by Cynthia Cockburn's model of short and long agendas [1989, 1991] which encompass a range of responses from

³ The first wave was mainly focused on women, for which was read white middle class women, whereas over the decades further analysis and critique from a number of directions - Black feminists, masculinity and queer studies, cultural, post structural and post modern perspectives – has led to a deeper and more complex analysis of gender and intersectionality studies which are also now beginning to speak to industrial relations.

⁴ The first WLM conference was held at Ruskin College in 1970. We organised another there in 2000 to celebrate 30 years of feminist activism and scholarship, and a 40th anniversary conference in 2010.

liberal, level playing field HRM approaches of non-discrimination through to radical affirmative action routes to ensure women, black women and men are able to access career and power positions in work and political organisations, including trade unions. Substantive contributors to this field have been women working in IR such as Sonia Liff [1988], Gill Kirton and Anne-Marie Greene [2005]. Cockburn's vision of a transformational politics with its melting away of a male monoculture and a restructuring of gender relations is a long way from reality.

In British trade unions themselves, many of these same discussions were informed by the work of what I have called sister-traveller⁵ academic women [Ledwith 2009]. The 1970s and 1980s was a period of early consolidation of women's structures and measures and an increase in women's profile and activities [Coote and Campbell 1987:159]. Charters for women within their trade unions and for women at work were adopted, and additional women's seats, including for Black women, ensured their better representation on the TUC General Council, and over time, in some of their own unions.

While the conversations of feminists on the left were about power and powerlessness, in this period, policy and practice in IR and allied fields concentrated on the more liberal end of legislative and employment measures to move to a 'more level playing field'. They were about reactive approaches, about removing barriers. The radical action was happening in places like the Greater London Council [GLC] where socialist feminist policy and practice shifted the balance until its abolition in 1986, further afield the USA developed affirmative action, and in Australia femocratic initiatives in public and political bodies were laying important foundations for change. During the 1980s and 1990s, ideas from thinkers such as Nancy Fraser and Iris Marion Young with their focus on inclusive social justice opened up possibilities in British unions, in particular the partner-unions which made up UNISON, to develop the groundbreaking and radical move of putting equality and gender and diversity democracy at the heart of its new constitution, with the tripartite structure and commitment to support and resources⁶ [Mann et al 1987]

POLICY AND PRAXIS

IR as a policy-oriented field of study implies that study 'for' as well as study 'of' is a central theme – theory into practice: *praxis*. As the BUIRA 08 statement reminds us: 'industrial relations scholars remain widely respected as advisors and consultants to government, employers and trade unions...' [p12,13] In the post-world war II period the main players were the male dominated Oxford school of industrial relations and later, Warwick University. Academic advisers to trade unions also have been largely based in the male IR academy. More recently the TUC's Organising Academy initiative has been monitored by a team at Cardiff University – where maybe for the first time women academics have been involved.

Women's research and publishing has been less visible, mainly existing parallel with and largely ignored by the 'male mainstream' in spite of the claim in the BUIRA 2008 statement that 'For example in recent decades our subject has been very receptive to the contributions of feminist analysis, with teaching and research.....'. As I will go on to argue, there has been no such gender turn yet in IR.

Yet, from the 1970s⁷ - and second wave feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement - there is a long list of women doing important policy focused research around key issues; Val

⁵ I use this term to include women who would not necessarily describe themselves as feminists, and male supporters, to denote those who nevertheless favour equality (probably liberal) measures and who are active in furthering gender equity and social justice.

⁶ This speaks to Nancy Fraser's three-dimensional, 3-R theory of justice Nancy Fraser (2004) redistribution of resources, recognition of rights of diverse oppressed groups, and representation rights.

⁷ Among earlier women, probably feminists, there was considerable attention being paid to some of these issues. For example, 19C women factory inspectors collected data about women and children working in factories, and in the 1920s, socialist feminist Barbara Drake was an important researcher. She carried out the first study of

Ellis' report (1981) *The role of trade unions in the promotion of equal opportunities* which became a reference point for the TUC, Jill Rubery's work on pay for the EOC, our work with SOGAT '82 in the 1980s and with UNISON and the GPMU in the 1990s. Carole Thornley's research on low pay for UNISON is an exemplar for its contribution on continually pushing the issues of unequal pay and low pay in the public sector to centre stage and informing policy, although as she herself concludes, 'much change' is still needed [2006:356].

Such praxis remains central to feminist and women's studies, especially in the British tradition [Stanley 1990]. So is the idea and practice of reflecting on one's feminist/political standpoint and what this means, especially in relation to research [Harding 1987]. In the IR academic field of writing and publishing, the cultural male norm, along with the author's objectivity⁸, is to address its subjects as gender neutral. Some of us, mainly women, have been breaking new ground in moving to advocate a standpoint perspective and discussing ways of identifying and challenging how gender-neutral work in the academy serves to perpetuate its gendered nature⁹. For example, in 2005 three UK women academics presented a critical re-reading of 12 key UK workplace case studies over the last 30 years to the annual BUIRA conference. Called *Why gender and 'difference' matters* [Holgate et al 2006], the authors argued that much research and writing in the field remains gender blind, including that by women. So strong are the cultural norms of the IR academy that 'seeing the previously hidden is difficult, because the very practices of thinking that we use are those created within the relations of ruling'. (Acker 1992:249). Acker and colleagues refer to feminist critiques of organisational gendering being 'buried under an avalanche of masculinist organizational work' from under which it took a decade and more to emerge. (Mills and Tancred 1992:6)

OUTSIDE/INSIDE, EXCLUSION-INCLUSION

Now that things are clearer, the gender relations in IR can be mapped onto a model of gender relations in trade unions first developed elsewhere (Ledwith and Colgan 2002) and further extended later [Ledwith 2006], of dynamic and overlapping regimes of closure and power within labour organisations. These involve practices of and responses to exclusion and demarcation, modes of inclusion, consequences of usurpation, strategies of transformation and coalition, and throughout, intersecting relationships with difference and diversity of class, gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality, and disability. See Ledwith 2006a for a fuller discussion. Add in Women's Studies itself and its relations with the academy, plus the study and practice of IR and trade unionism, and we can see recurring and dynamic relations of exclusion, marginalisation, demarcation, closure and power.

Feminists writing about the place of Women's Studies [WS] have discussed the way in which this field began extra-murally, literally outside the walls – of the male academy [Bird 2000] Subsequently WS moved inside the 'mainstream', but in the last decade we have seen it squeezed from its own space to become absorbed [assimilated?] into gender studies, and many courses closed. Too much mainstreaming, too much integration? [Thompson, 2000: 101]. Nevertheless, the contributions of WS and feminist thinking have been and continue to be decisive in reshaping the academy and academic thought, 'of shifting the paradigm' [Stanley 1990], and recently it has been claimed that the emergence of WS through contentious collective action can be seen as the development of a New Knowledge Movement [Arthur 2009]. No such gender turn can yet be claimed for the field of IR/TU studies, despite a loose alliance of academic feminists and trade unionists seeking gender democracy and inclusion. Nevertheless, inside the academy particular pivotal moments

women in trade unions and with colleagues, was involved in major investigation of women workers during the first world war, and other studies of women's work [see Ledwith 2009b for further discussion].

⁸ An early exception is Richard Hyman's forward to his 1972 classic *Strikes*, where he confesses he 'cannot claim to be detached.... I cannot profess neutrality' [p8].

⁹ Not necessarily replacing gender-neutral and thus gendered work, but being inclusive [Cockburn 1990], Acker [1992]

moving in this direction can be identified¹⁰. One was the 1989 Industrial Relations Journal's [IRJ] special issue on women and employment edited by Linda Dickens. Over the decades we have seen Jill Rubery and Colette Fagan's 1995 call for *Comparative Industrial Relations Research: towards reversing the gender bias*, and Judy Wajcman address the annual BUIRA conference at Warwick in 1999 on *Feminism Facing Industrial Relations in Britain* [2000]. In 2005 Anne Marie Greene and Gill Kirton edited a special issue of the European Journal of Industrial Relations on gender, equality and IR [2005], and Geraldine Healy, Lise Lotte Hansen and I jointly edited another special issue of the IRJ in 2006. Included in this special issue were demands ranging from the 'ongoing task of uncovering gender in IR' [2006:297], to Holgate et al's identification of three methodological approaches which, they argued, could help to understand the lives of workers and were intrinsic to gender-sensitive analysis. These were: a framework that recognised intersectionality, accounts that accommodated both material and cultural explanations, and a research process that was reflexive and recognised positionality. Other papers reprised these calls for change. Carole Thornley pointed out that it was difficult to see how the pace of change in public sector IR could be understood *except* [my italics] with reference to gender as a basic rather than peripheral feature, and that 'gender is critical to our understanding of the effects of the structured disadvantages experienced by workers in this sector on a daily basis' [p356]. Ardha Danieli identified the 'task' as finding ways of acknowledging and attending to both class and gender without merely adding gender to class analyses or class analysis to gender theories [p341]. Sue Ledwith proposed a framework of 'dual praxis' whereby positionality and gender analysis become routine in the field [p395].

All these are key and central to the reform and renewal of the IR academic project, of gender IR policy and practice, as well as of trade unionism. However, recognising the danger of assimilation into the 'mainstream', women have developed a twin track approach by continuing to seek qualified [as above] inclusion and also organising autonomously both conceptually and temporally. Self organisation is a place in which women can meet to develop individual skills and confidence and develop consciousness, and can also develop collective strategies for carrying the gender agenda into the mainstream as well as for reshaping, transforming the field itself. [Colgan and Ledwith 2000, 2002a/7:22]

Briskin [1993, 1999] has warned that the success of this separate organising depends on maintaining a balance between 'autonomy' from the structures and practices of the labour movement and 'integration' into those structures. Too little integration and the result is marginalisation, too much and the radical edge can be blunted with the result being assimilation. Briskin was first writing about trade unions and gender, but we can also apply it to the IR academy, where Australian Barbara Pocock has commented that when women research in the 'mainstream' field of IR – collective bargaining, trade unionisation, industrial conflict, pay and conditions, their contribution to the field is valued. But when researching gender relations in these areas both the researcher and the work becomes discounted [2000].

In 1999 we also self organised into an International Gender and Industrial Relations Network and got ourselves onto agendas of the International IR Association in special streams and seminars, and in 2003 it was agreed to bring it onto the IRRA mainstream agenda while still maintaining its separate space as a gender and IR stream [Healy et al 2006]. These meetings of women at conferences is one of the pleasures of women networking, where we have our own space to update, do business and generally have a good time.

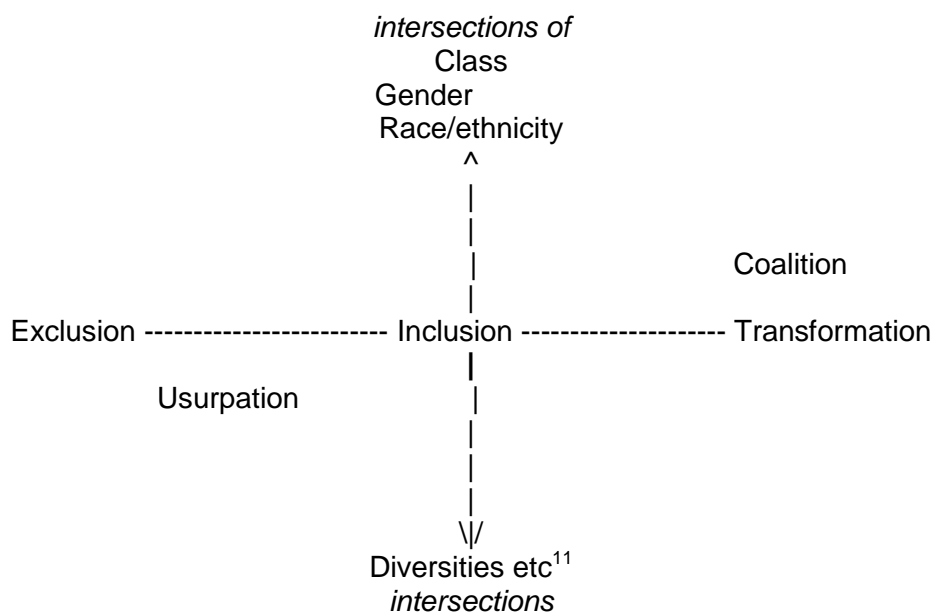
To pull these strands together in what is a complex multi layered relationship, **Figure 1**. schematically sets out the inter-relationships with the exclusion–inclusion axis extending to an ideal of transformation as envisaged by Cockburn [see p4 above] and intersecting with those categorised as excluded, marginalised or being in a conflictual relationship with the white, male elite; ie gender, race/ethnic and other diversity groups.

¹⁰ For pivotal moments among trade union women, see Ledwith 2009b.

This is then overlaid with the work of thinkers such as Iris Marion Young and Nancy Fraser. For example Young (1990) argues for an inclusive democracy that acknowledges social differentiation without exclusion, a needing to accept difference *and* create mutual recognition and respect that transcends that difference. This also speaks to the conceptualising the intersection of gender, class and diversities in order to reveal and understand better the relationships within gender and diversity as well as between them. Emerging from Black USA legal analysis [Crenshaw 1989], intersectionality has become central to a more developed theorising of issues of identity, and as suggested above, is one of the planks needed for a more sophisticated analytical approach.

Figure 1.

**3-dimensions:
Recognition
Representation
Redistribution
- demands achieved**



**3-dimensional demands:
Recognition
Representation
Redistribution**

GENDER, THE ACADEMY AND IR ANALYSIS

I now move to illustrate this analysis with evidence from women working in the IR academy, through research carried out over a period between March 2009 and March 2010.

Research methods and responses

I sent a questionnaire to 60 women who work in the academic field of gender and IR, asking about their experiences of gender work in IR. The survey was mainly geared to those working in the UK, with a small number to women in Anglophone IR fields in the USA,

¹¹ NB. Judith Butler's sceptical discussion of the 'etc' at the end of lists of social divisions [Pheonix 2006:188]

Canada, and Australia. Many of the women were known to me through various networks, and others were identified as published academics in the field. The questionnaire also went round the women's IR international network. I was mainly interested in interrogating the British field of IR which has a particular place in the discipline, so closely is it aligned with trade unionism and the left political spectrum. In additional responses and conversations with colleagues from elsewhere, for example, women academics from mainland Europe, including Scandinavia, it seems that commonly the academic field of industrial relations is not a separate discipline existing in its own right.

Even so, the response rate was only 37%, despite having sent the survey round three times, and offering to share the findings with respondents. I did receive a number of emails from colleagues saying they just did not have time to do it. This mirrors a running theme of women's lives and research about women in work, trade unions, management – ie in the public domain, in employment, and speaks to those 'greedy' institutions including unions, about which Suzanne Franzway has written [2001]. On the other hand several of those who did take part commented on how interesting they had found doing the questioning – leading them to reflect on the impact and effects of their work on gender, and in the subject's mainstream, and also on their own position in the 'rather masculinised' male academy, including the pleasures and difficulties involved. I shared the first round of findings with respondents, and subsequent discussions with women also produced further rich material.

GENDER, THE ACADEMY AND IR ANALYSIS FINDINGS

First, to say that, unsurprisingly, the findings followed the contours of the 3 main dimensions discussed here; the IR academy, trade unions, and gender and IR/TUs, as well as being informed by feminist thinking, writing and experiences.

Profiles

Elsewhere I and colleagues have referred to UK trade union leaderships as being 'pale, male and stale' [Colgan and Ledwith 2002b], that is white, male and over the age of 40 – a key concern of trade unions is the absence of young members [Lopata, 2007]. The women responding to the survey more or less mirrored the first and third of these characteristics. All were white. One identified as lesbian. Only six women were aged under 50, and all were over 30, with the rest [62%] being 50 or above. Although I know that some of those to whom I sent the questionnaire are in the younger categories, few participated. One woman in her forties commented that there was a problem that some of the younger women who were entering the field had not been influenced by the values and ideals of feminism and had no truck with gender research either.

Routes to IR

Routes into industrial relations were through academic study, trade union activism or paid union work, or allied work such as with ACAS. Undergraduate study was overwhelmingly in the social sciences; mainly sociology of various sorts, with industrial relations, economics, HRM, law, and women's studies for each of two or three, and others with first degrees in politics, social geography, and history. Those who didn't come via social science had studied variously: modern languages, drama, and English. Postgraduate study was firstly MAs in Industrial Relations and allied subjects, with half a dozen having studied at Warwick University, and then doctorates, often part time. One of the Warwick graduates described how she was 'grabbed' by the subject – 'I found something that was important, interesting and relevant to me' and chose to focus on topics relating to women, including in her dissertation. She was mentored by two men and a woman tutor - 'how important it is to think about how we treat students'. She went on to do her doctorate on women and trade unions. Among the women who studied for PhDs is a handful among the over 40-year olds who did so via publication, illustrating the importance of such a route for those developing their careers when their children were older and/or coming later into the field.

Work experience both outside the academy, and then inside was closely bound up with the women's trade union activism. Almost all had been or currently are lay union activists – tutoring shop stewards, WEA tutoring - with several having also worked for trade unions in a range of roles such as education, editing union journal women's pages, working in a union's international department. As one younger woman wrote: 'absolutely central to my approach is being a current practitioner; ie a union rep and activist, as well as researching those roles'.

Other routes included: 'I came to IR etc via the study of migration, and I came to migration studies via activism with migrant workers and I came to that from my involvement in Philippines solidarity work'.

and

'I came to union activism as a socialist feminist in the 1970s. The union movement was very male-dominated and patriarchal in those days'. She was involved in women's organising and from her experience began theorising.

Another woman started by tutoring women's studies, especially issues of women workers and gender relations, but could find little material with which to teach. She went on to carry out extensive research in the field especially in central and eastern Europe. For her, doing this means that 'Writing can sometimes make the invisible visible, which is satisfying'.

A third, now a professor, came from a family of farmers, started work as an economic researcher in a bank. She became a union delegate in banking, mentored by an older woman, and 'I came to see that collective voice and union membership was essential for workers at whatever level, whether they were counting notes in the bowels of a bank or a well paid middle manager with an occupational injury'. This led her to union involvement, work-related research, teaching labour studies and eventually into being a 'proper researching' academic with a PhD in gender studies and on to establishing a research centre. 'All of that took 30 years, and I have had a fantastic working life'.

Influences

Of those who answered the question on influences, and in other comments, 13 cited family as being influential on their choice of and manner of managing their careers, including parents who were 'leftish' or 'definitely Labour party'. Two came from immigrant or refugee backgrounds. 'My family were refugees [Jewish] who became active in the union movement in early 1900s, and many feminists, who reacted against orthodoxy. Marginalisation was key to their experience and IR offered an entry point to addressing it. Few before my generation had access to education, and labour studies was a logical way, alongside women's studies, to connect the personal and political'.

Fathers were cited most often as being influential. They were socialist, closet socialist, and trade unionist. One woman's mother was a teacher who had participated in a strike even though this was unlawful; 'It made a strong impression on me'. Unsurprisingly, women's own children had an impact, especially on careers. For three women it prolonged their studies and delayed their university careers. For another, 'caring was 'very demanding, but helped to refine my theories on domestic labour'.

Other women were cited as being influential in a range of ways; as mentors, friends, supporters, research 'subjects' who were also colleagues and/or became friends. One woman observed, 'to get on in academia it is essential to have sponsors and mentors. It has taken me a long time to realise that I am actually rather good at what I do, but there are precious few women around to supply that support. My career really took off when I went to work at a university where there was a more established woman. She provided the first real mentorship. What a difference this makes'.

Political positioning

As already indicated in the earlier discussion, political commitment to the field as both academic and practitioner is the norm in British-type industrial relations. In addition, in this study, almost all the women identified as Feminist, with one or two 'don't know's'. Other political standpoints were bound up with their feminism and also with political positions on the left which included socialist feminist [6], Marxist-feminist [2], Marxist [2], socialist [5], feminist socialist materialist, socialist feminist lesbian, and five unspecified who claimed political consciousness.

Key texts and writers

Such standpoints are closely linked to texts/writers which have been key in informing women's scholarship. As academics in the field, we had all been strongly influenced by, and our politics and gender politics informed by the [male] Marxist approach of IR thinking. There was an even balance between the texts written by men and by women; around forty of each. The male writer/thinker whose work was most frequently mentioned in the question on key texts was Richard Hyman, and of the women it was Cynthia Cockburn, with Linda Briskin second. After that male Marxists scored equally, with Marx himself, Henry Braverman and John Kelly topping the poll. Other male thinkers in this cluster were EP Thompson, Nichols and Beynon, Rex, Dahrendorf, and Runciman, and the women were Rosa Luxembourg and Heidi Hartmann. Hartmann, Michelle Barratt and Cynthia Cockburn have been central to feminist analysis of class and patriarchy and Cockburn's case study work in the field, especially in masculinised industries such as printing and technology, has been seminal. Women writers in the field mentioned more than once were Linda Dickens, Jill Rubery, Sally Westwood, and Fiona Colgan and Sue Ledwith. One of the women wrote that for her key texts tended to be the early ones 'because they opened the door for the rest of us, and "scales dropped from our eyes" in terms of what was possible in terms of scholarship and action'. There was also a long list of diverse influential writers with just one mention each.

WOMEN WORKING IN THE ACADEMY – WHAT IS IT LIKE?

I asked a number of questions about women's experiences of working in the academy, including the pleasures and the difficulties. Several of the responses were written at some length and with much feeling. Women's experiences in the academy generally and the IR field in particular were most often reported negatively, and ranged from 'tedious' [re men and male bonding], 'combative', 'challenging', marginalising of women, especially women who work on gender issues, 'hard' and 'tough', through to 'horrendous', and some of the women responding to this survey are angry about these things.

On the positive side, a few women wrote that as well as the difficulties, they worked with male colleagues who were sensitive to gender issues. For example, 'I found it easy to work with male colleagues. The main difficulty is exclusion from informal, largely male bonding which goes on outside work, in the pub, where work is discussed and decisions often made'. Another wrote: 'very good when there are supportive other women, but often tough with male colleagues – not as individuals, but institutionally'. A small number wrote that they enjoyed the 'combative' relationship and culture. These were women who tended to have worked in masculine worlds prior to the academy such as journalism, the energy and engineering industry, trade unions: 'I'm used to male environments, quite enjoy some of them, but find the sexism of the university environment quite shocking'.

Difficulties

However, the negative experiences were overwhelming; 'always challenging. Sometimes downright tiring and irritating. I never cease to be amazed at the resilience of sexism in what is supposed to be this liberal end, enlightened part of the establishment'.

For several women, sexist discrimination was alive and well. More than one woman described working in the academy as 'horrendous' – one writing that it was 'really only for the stubborn or crazy'. Another that; 'I found this questionnaire *extremely* difficult to complete.... had several attempts, and found I got angry [not at the questionnaire, but at the sentiments some of the questions aroused!] I had to set it aside several times and then go back to it. I was also fearful about how honest I could be in a number of places without bugging up my career or putting off young women entirely, which probably shows the extent to which a number of us have to subdue natural feelings on a day to day basis – and also shows how important your survey and subsequent writing will be. Part of me was trying to balance out the genuine help I've had along the way from a minority of genuinely feminist men [and a majority of excellent and supportive women] with the more usual experience of male academics where there seems to be a gradation of responses to women academics which range broadly from the initial attempt to treat you as non-existent, to some attempts to incorporation if you can be at all instrumental to them, to finally outright hostility and dirty tricks if you show any signs of independence at all'.

A further woman wrote a long piece about her experiences, finally saying 'I had better stop. This has rather opened up a flood gate!'

Among this group, it seems that the higher women aim, the stronger the homosocial opposition. Some who are now professors, described how male colleagues had kept them back: 'It took me a long time relative to other less qualified males to become a professor. I'm pretty sure my head of department scuppered some of my attempts at promotion, favouring another male colleague instead'.

and

'In my most recent post [a senior position] a male candidate threatened to take the university to a tribunal because they appointed me [the only female candidate]. Am I the only woman that this happens to every time I am successful at something?' This woman went on to describe how: 'over the next year they [senior male colleagues] plotted to undermine me. Some may think me paranoid, but colleagues actually heard some of this'. She eventually developed strategies for managing 'these difficult people' which enabled her to become 'much more confident'.

and

'I had a head of Department who refused to approve my registration for PhD as he said he had no money yet had just approved this for two males. The Dean overruled him. I got my PhD very quickly [by publication] and it took one of these males over 10 years, while the other still hasn't got there'.

This masculine and patriarchal culture is experienced as insidious and inimical to gender work: 'I think there is a subtle culture of marginalising women, especially women who work on gender issues'. And younger women also have severe difficulties; 'it is harder at more junior levels; promotion is always a concern'. One woman described dealing with distressed female PhD students who were quite shocked about the macho culture at conferences particularly, and another of long standing wrote about that period in her career: 'Nothing could have prepared me for this, and I worry very much about young women coming into this environment'. Another woman said: 'I used to be more optimistic of change but forces in higher education... macho IR etc have swung the pendulum backwards. Not men as such, but the *kinds* of men who seek power... who set a certain kind of 'male bar and culture' for the rest of us. Some men and women then conform, others continue to oppose and others become jaded'.

Another woman concluded: 'We are a million miles off 'mainstreaming' and I'm not sure how we advance the subject matter'.

Pleasures

Even the women who had had the hardest times found great pleasures too: 'Working with some exceptionally good academics, nice, kind intelligent people'. Many referred particularly to pleasurable working with female colleagues across networks, and also working with women with whom they may be researching. For example: 'the interest and commitment to unions and social movements. The union women in particular – I admire their politics, their canny politics, their courage, and they can tell good stories!'

Making a contribution

Most of the group, and all the more experienced women, had a strong record of research and publishing in the field. When asked to identify up to three research projects of which they were most proud and why, the subject matter was overwhelmingly around gender – not surprisingly. The pride was two-fold: first in the contribution of their work to academic theory and knowledge – 'helped, I think, to better theorise about gender', and 'some of the recent work I have done has perhaps broken new ground'. Influence over and informing the curriculum was also important. Secondly is the contribution to policy and practice in the public sphere such as pay, in trade unions, in helping make visible previously hidden women and their issues, such as a project about low paid public sector workers which 'resulted in more interest in certain groups of workers', another which 'made a real difference to the bargaining landscape for women in health and local government', and yet another which provided the 'opportunity, via publications, to tell the stories of BAME women union activists'. One woman wrote: 'this was an interesting question because it made me aware that I do feel good about some of the work I have done'.

These feelings about their work identified a strand which ran right through all the women's responses: the 'feeling that I have made a contribution to something worthwhile'; 'the possibility, however remote, that working lives may be improved as a result and that middle class HRM students may come to realise that working people are just as human as they are'. It all came together for the woman who wrote: 'making small advances in knowledge that may help low paid and hardworking women who make society anywhere near functional'. And 'to work in a field which promotes social justice'. In other words, 'the interface between academia, activism and policy'.

IR as a 'gripping' subject

The subject matter itself has a great pull: 'It continues to fascinate me intellectually'; 'the debates, collegiality and endless fascination with IR. When I attended my first BUIRA conference I felt I'd come home – though a black colleague recently that she had felt alienated by the white maleness of that same event.' Another enjoys its dynamism and its drama, 'especially employment tribunals and during strikes'; and another sees as important: 'taking feminist analysis and gender critique into my mainstream IR teaching, and seeing men especially, grapple with and take on the issues'.

From this gender analysis and critique then flow the IR issues and themes which are significant for women in the field. I asked three questions about the study of IR/trade unions; what were the key [general] current issues in IR, what were the key issues in the study of gender and IR/TUs, and what changes would the respondents like to see? I have organised the responses into broad themes as shown in the tables below. It was striking to see how many of the issues raised in the *Key issues in the study of gender* question were framed in the context of praxis – seeking ways of informing change, not just studying it – 'really useful

knowledge' [Thompson 2000]¹². There was a small number of comments specifically about research, though very few about research methods, feminist, in particular.

As might be expected there was considerable overlap between the 3 questions. Within the answers about IR studies generally, the responses were wide ranging, forming three main clusters, within which gender is strongly implied: labour markets, precarious work and the need to regulate, being mentioned most often. This was then linked to a theme about social inequalities, especially the need for fairness in reward systems and pay equity, and legal frameworks. A third theme was around class, capitalism, power, and mobilising. **See Table 1.**

When it came to key issues in *gender* and IR, the themes were both similar and different. There was considerable emphasis on the social processes of gender politics and power relations which result in women's under-representation, marginalisation and lack of access to power. The need for contemporary women's spaces and affirmative action measures were strongly advocated. A third key theme was around material and organisational issues, with pay – equal pay, low pay and comparable worth by far the most pressing issue. The links here with occupational and labour market segregation, women's bad work and working conditions and exclusion from protection, were clearly made with a focus on personnel practices such as childcare, family friendly policies, and legal protection. These are topics which feature strongly in teaching, research and analysis by women academics, but are addressed much less in texts by male researchers and writers, who tend to concentrate on un-gendered IR 'mainstream' issues.

Table 1. Key issues and themes in Industrial Relations – and gender

Themes	Key issues in IR	Key issues in <i>gender</i> and IR
Labour markets Work	Precarious work The need to regulate	Labour market issues
Material inequalities		Pay/equal and low pay
Social inequalities	Class, capitalism Power	International, comparative work
HRM policy and practice		Organisational equality policy and practice
Activism	Mobilising	Women's spaces Affirmative action
Social processes		Gender politics Power relations

In the study of trade unions, 'dynamic' themes were identified, related to both strategy and change, see **Table 2**. Union democracy, inclusivity, and coalition building were the most strongly represented here. Internationalism, the impact and responses to globalisation and relations with the State were other mainstream issues, with union responses such as organising of various excluded/marginalised groups are also on the list. There was a strong relationship here with key gender and TU issues where the main items were union gender democracy, especially in leadership, collectivism and agency, strategies for change and gender bargaining rights.

¹² Male radicals and revolutionaries from Marx to [Freire, Gramsci and Illich, [see Allman 1988] have long advocated education for socialism. And Ruskin College's founding purpose was 'to educate working men [sic] in order to achieve social change' [Pollins, 1984:9]

Table 2. Key issues and themes in the study and practice of Trade Unions

Themes	Key issues in TUs	Key issues in <i>gender</i> and TUs
Democracy	TU democracy	Women's under representation and TU leadership Gender, TU democracy
Collectivism and agency	Coalitions Social movements Solidarity Organising	Activism, agency, solidarity, community collectivism, organising
Change	Strategies for change	Strategies for change
International	International European Globalisation	
Rights	Legal rights - strike	The gender bargaining agenda

Changes in study, policy and practice in ir and tus

There was a recurring anxiety about the future of industrial relations as a subject. The findings were that there was a lack of respect and place for it; IR needed to adapt in order to retain its relevance. Partly this was seen as its problem of a reputation for being theory-lite and inwardly focused. As one respondent put it: 'we are still fighting Marxist purists; it's gender versus class'; more useful would be analysis of how the two are inextricably combined. Several women wanted to see gender mainstreamed, although one commented; 'there is still a long way to go before it is'. Yet another woman observed: 'the marginalisation of this topic goes beyond the accidental and lags well behind the realities in employment and union membership – this should be addressed'.

Others went further, proposing that rather than gender be mainstreamed 'into' the 'malestream', *all* analysis and in academic discourse should be gendered. A re-balancing was needed. This included a call for a more sophisticated conceptualisation and analysis of gender itself. The theorising of gender, race, sexuality, diversity, equalities and inequalities needs to be framed in a visionary and deep analysis, one that models their intersections in relations of power, through discourse and discursive practice.

So, these responses point to a project that is about engaging with gender and diversity as a discipline in its own right, about taking a wider inter-disciplinary approach. It is notable that in the book *What's the Point* [2009]... really the only chapter that does some of this is by a sociologist.

Research in the IR field was addressed by a small number of the survey respondents, with calls for gender research to be accepted 'as of equal worth among all IR-researchers and in all journals', and that gender and IR/Management to be a sub-panel of the RAE [now REF¹³] Business and Management panel.

DISCUSSION

So where does this take us? Clearly gender issues and gender analysis have emerged well and truly in the IR academy, and are evident in a number of ways. Feminist empiricism is manifest in the large number of research studies of women's work, pay, trade union membership and participation, where the main aim is to make the gender issues visible with

¹³ Research Excellence Framework.

a view to informing and hopefully driving changes in policy and practice. Feminist empiricism is described as the least threatening of feminist epistemologies as it leaves intact traditional constructs and principles, seeking to use traditional methods and approaches more appropriately, challenging the way methods are used rather than challenging the methods themselves (Letherby 2003:49). Nevertheless, in industrial relations, this approach of putting women, and gender, and more recently, race/ethnicity, sexuality, disability and age, back in has been important in publicly revealing aspects of women's lives and experiences, often for the first time, and has led to substantial legal and policy change, for example in the field of equal pay¹⁴. Such research has also provided important evidence of trade union membership exclusion and segregation, of democratic deficits in relation to gender, ethnicity, sexuality and disability in union structures, and which has helped to inform and press for union policies and practice to challenge and change these.

The more radical position, feminist standpoint research practice is also in place, and goes further: it sees women actively constructing and interpreting the social processes and social relations which constitute their everyday realities and also as a way to empower oppressed groups, value their experiences and point towards a way to develop an oppositional consciousness [Harding, 1987: 185; 2004:2] [see also discussion in the editorial by Healy et al, and in the article by Holgate et al 2006].

Meanwhile both in the academy and in labour movements women's work, gender work, is fiercely contested, with only a handful of 'mainstream' male writers acknowledging the significance of and building in and on our work with theirs. More often gender is an add-on or put in a separate box rather than being involved in any meaningful way to inform traditional theorising. Since IR is so closely related to policy, clearly if half the population [women] are discounted in this way then so is policy and practice in relation to women's paid work in the academy, in the workplace and their role in labour movements.

So what about a gender turn? Could, or is, gender and IR become part of a New Knowledge Movement? [NKM], as touched on earlier. According to its advocate, Arthur [2009], a NKM is constituted within the frame of new social movements, having at its core the concepts of contentious politics and collective action. Arthur explores these through an examination of the disciplines of Women's Studies and Asian American Studies, in the USA, and which has relevance to our gender and IR project. Clearly from the findings of my survey, we can identify both contentious politics and collective action as being centrally involved. Emotion such as anger, and issues of social justice aka Fraser, and Young, are other characteristics identified with social movements and with labour movement mobilising [Kelly 1998]. All are evident in the various responses to this survey, for example, experiences in the academy generally and the IR field in particular.

A more transformational approach would be to reverse the margins and the mainstream, putting gender at the centre of all IR analysis, policy and practice. Probably a very long agenda.

Finally, do some of these findings offer a new site of engagement for gender and IR, and if so how can we carry it forward?

POSTSCRIPT

In 2009, following the debates triggered by *What's The Point...* BUIRA set up an Equality & Diversity Working Party to develop proposals for the introduction of policy and practice within the Association. In March 2010 it sent a questionnaire survey round to members with the

¹⁴ That pay remains unequal illustrates however that such approaches are limited by the boundaries of liberal philosophies of gender inequality and related remedies.

intention of reporting the findings at its conference this year. The initiative came at a time when a woman was President; Professor Rosemary Lucas has said that this is something she very much wanted to do during her presidency. All the working party members are women.

S Ledwith
March 2010.

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