Cold War and the Gendering of Management Theory

The gendering of management theory can only be understood within the context of a larger discourse of work/family in which the social construction of womanhood severely limited the work role of women. The discourses dominating the cold war period—the patriarchal positioning of work, the so-called "feminine mystique", suburbanization and the suppression of radicalism under McCarthyism, created the conditions whereby the discourse of work-family that dominated (and continues to dominate) management theory achieved the hegemonic status of unchallenged -- and unchallengable -- "common sense" assumption. In this paper I examine the discourses of the cold war period, not merely as a reflection and interpretation of specific social contexts, but as an active force in the social construction of work relations.

Introduction

The landscape of women's labour force participation in Canada has been characterized by roadblocks and a clearly delineated mapping of roles. Most theories that guide research in work and family date from the 1950s — the Cold War period (Barnett & Hyde, 2001) — when the term "work-family conflict" first emerges in organizational literature (Runte and Mills, 2001). It has been examined, for example, that post-WWII, women's negotiations of social structural constraints and opportunities either steered them away from homemaking and towards paid employment or led them to embrace homemaking and reject employment (Gerson 1985, Runte and Mills, 2001, 2003). This discourse, in articulating the positioning of the work domain as masculine, established work as inherently incompatible with the feminine family domain. This discourse, however, excludes the lived experience of many women and reinforces the demarcation of sex-based roles. Women have always engaged in market work, either by choice or necessity. They, as reflected in this discourse, were "not supposed to" work however, and their participation in the labour market was seen as either unfortunate or subversive (Runte and Mills, 2001).

An example of the "unfortunate" need for women's work is WWII when female labour was temporarily supported as part of the war effort. The discourse of work/family and attendant roles which dominated the pre-war period predisposed women to acquiesce to existing power relationships, in spite of contradictions in the objective conditions of their lived experiences. Women's efforts to maintain their positions during the postwar period was "subversive", as revealed in the birth of the work-family conflict discourse which emphasized the untenable nature of women's labour market participation (Runte and Mills, 2001). In other words, the dominant discourse of work/family encouraged a false consciousness among women that undermined their ability to recognize the true conditions of their social relations; to recognize themselves as a class; or to take advantage of changing social and economic conditions to develop their own feminist discourse. The emergence of the work-family conflict literature out of the cold war context therefore pre-empted and isolated alternative discourses as subversive, thus rendering real social change more difficult.
This paper begins with an exploration of the social conditions of the post-war period as reflected in the discourse of the cold war. The intersection of discourses of the cold war period and work-family reveal how the potentiality for women's labour force participation was suppressed. Only by recognizing the hegemonic nature of the dominant work/family discourse can the impact of changing social and economic conditions on feminism, management theory, and the role of women in the economy be understood.

**Demobilization of the Home Front**

The most obvious social trend of the immediate post-war period was the demobilization of the armed forces, and the subsequent displacement of war-time female labour, particularly within the relatively high-paying industrial sector. "In the two years after the war, some 2 million women had lost their jobs (Halberstam 1993, 589)." That this massive displacement did not engender a correspondingly vigorous and widespread opposition is a testament to the power of hegemonic discourse to overwhelm the marginalized population's ability to recognize the objective conditions of the social relations of production.

The war had created severe labour shortages that women had then supplied. Many working class women had held jobs in peace time, but “what was new in World War II was the upgrading of available jobs and the entrance of middle-class women into the labour force (Weatherford, 1990, p 191).” Thus, war-time employment created three conditions which in other contexts has often lead to revolutionary social change.

First, just as the shift from cottage to factory employment created conditions for the emergence of factory workers' consciousness of themselves as a separate and oppressed class, bringing large numbers of women into industrial settings from other, more typically isolated, forms of labour seems as if it should have facilitated the emergence of a feminist class consciousness. Yet this does not appear to have been the case.

Second, the successful movement of women into previously male dominated industries must have led many women to question existing notions of femininity as weak, helpless, and ineffectual. It is often possible to convince excluded populations that they lack the requisite knowledge, skills, attitudes, or stamina to undertake particular tasks, but once having successfully filled these jobs, how is it possible to convince the incumbent to then meekly step aside, simply because a member of a more privileged group wishes the position? American surveys taken in 1944-1945 revealed that 75 to 80 percent of women in war production areas planned to remain in the labour force after victory was won, and they wanted to keep the jobs they were then performing (Pidgeon, 1947). This reluctance to leave wartime employ was echoed in Canada: During the war we did everything a man could do except fight, and after it was all over there was a lot of unrest as well as happiness and sadness all mixed together. Some women were saying to themselves, “I don’t really want to have children. I don’t have to be a housewife. I want my own freedom, now, because I’ve proved that I’m as smart as any other person....” So if people did marry, they had a different outlook because they were different women than they had been before the war. (Gossage, 1991)

The potential explosiveness of this situation is clearly evident in the close parallel of the post-war anti-colonial movements: just as men came home to take the better jobs away from women, the Dutch and French attempted to return to their former colonies; but having successfully fulfilled senior positions within the colonial administration in the absence of their
imperial masters, the locals now knew themselves capable, and so rebelled. Were women not in
the same position for the same reasons at the same historical moment? Indeed, not only were
women excluded from the jobs in which they had already proved themselves more than capable,
they also had to face going from the role of chief provider to a position of renewed dependency
within the family system; from managing alone to being managed. The revolution of rising
expectations would seem to be a reasonable expectation in such situations, but does not appear to
have led to either a feminist class consciousness nor an effective feminist movement.

Third, the inclusion of college-educated, middle-class women in war-time employment
would seem ideal for the creation of an intellectual vanguard around which an activist movement
could coalesce. Worker movements have traditionally been led by middle class intellectuals, and
while women had always worked, war-time employment was the first time such significant
numbers of middle and upper class women were drawn into paid employment. Yet the future
founders of post-war feminism, such as Betty Friedan, were unable to articulate their grievances
over demobilization as a 'class' action, and the feminist movement remained stalled until at least
the early 1960s.

Clash of Discourses

Given the presence in the immediate post-war period of the material conditions for the
emergence of a feminist consciousness that could have challenged and supplanted the dominant
discourse of the time, it becomes necessary to explain why it did not happen. The potential
triggers failed to come to fruition, I would argue, for three related reasons. First, the patriarchal
discourse of work was sufficiently dominant that it had become, in Gramsci's terms, hegemonic:
unquestioned and unquestionable, a common sense understanding of the social construction of
women's role as helpmate and temporary worker. Second, post-war prosperity quickly removed
educated middle class women -- the most obvious source of potential leadership -- from the
equation, through subrbanization and the creation of a secondary discourse: the feminine
mystique that individualized and psychologized women's grievances. Third, McCarthyism created
a climate in which any questioning of the status quo was aggressively discouraged.

The Social Construction of the Female as Helpmate and Temporary Worker.

The dominant discourse of work/family had always insisted that women's first priority
must be the family, and that work was appropriate only as a temporary expediency to "help out"
one's husband or family. Women were expected to leave paid employment upon marriage; a
suitable marriage partner would provide financially for the family unit. Although some women
with families and husbands had always worked, their employ was seen as stop-gap “assistance” to
the primary breadwinner—even if the wife’s employment endured for years.

War-time employment, although potentially heralding a significant social change, was
instead incorporated within the dominant discourse by the simple expediency of designating it an
emergency measure, a temporary helping out which did not necessitate a redefinition of the
responsibilities of the home: “There is little evidence that family members shared her housework
(Weatherford, 1990, p 164).” Indeed, by “doing her share” on the home-front, engaging in war
industry labour, a woman remained the helpmate of the male doing the “real work” of war on the
front lines. Discourse, therefore, revolved around the role of women in the maintenance of the
“home-front” rather than the movement of women into the male domain of work. The boundaries
of the “home” were extended to include the “home-front”. The female as “helpmate” to the male
doing the work of war was compatible to previously held notions of femininity. Thus any
discussion of these potentially profound social changes (on the rare occasions when it occurred)
was framed in terms of the needs of the war and not the needs of women (Runte and Mills, 2003; Weatherford, 1990, p 133). Masculinist notions of the role of women had not abruptly changed, but had merely accommodated a temporary reallocation of duties in a way that continued to cast the female in a secondary and supportive function. Further, women were presented as "objects of male obligation" (Runte and Mills, 2003); men were to fight, not as an obligation of citizenship, but to protect their sisters, wives, mothers and daughters (Westbrook, 1990). The role of women had not substantively changed and now it was time for women to “go home” (Runte and Mills, 2003).

Although many women did leave paid employment post war and return to the home, the majority simply returned to poorly paid employment, rather than to a protected domestic nest with a (financially) supportive husband (Ware, 1989, p 239). The number of women in paid labour did not return to prewar levels, although their employ in the higher paid positions enjoyed during the war was severely curtailed and they lost the protection of unionized environments (Kaledin, 1984).

The dominant discourse largely ignored the objective conditions of the social relations of production that now included a reserve army of underemployed women, and continued the social construction of the woman's role as responsible for the home and as helpmate to the male. Paid employment was acceptable only on a temporary basis and only when it did not conflict with these primary responsibilities. A 1958 Canadian (Department of Labour) survey of employed married women documents these attitudes in the immediate postwar period:

Working mothers with young children were torn between the need to bring home a paycheck and the feeling that they should be at home looking after their children. Wives performed the housework even when they were employed. Women in the 1950s saw the home as their major priority; they adapted to conflicting social pressures by working before having children, withdrawing into the home to raise them, then returning to work at middle age after the children had grown up (Krahn and Lowe, 1988, 128).

This pattern of temporary employment has an obvious implication for the gendering of management theory. "Because most wives in the 1950s and 1960s responded to the demands of child rearing by leaving the labour force, employers assumed that women must have a weaker attachment to paid work than men (Krahn and Lowe, 1988, 128)." These attitudes persisted through to the end of the century, and are arguably still with us:

The same family constraints on employment for women clearly still exist; but the important point is far fewer women leave the labour force at all, and those who do leave for a shorter time. Despite this, employers continue to discriminate against young women in hiring and promotion decisions, assuming that, like their mothers, they cannot be relied upon to stick with a job as long as a man.(Krahn and Lowe, 1988, p. 128)

Suburbanization and the Feminine Mystique

Another obvious post-war trend with significant implications for feminism and the social construction of women's role was suburbanization. Post-War prosperity accelerated the move away from the downtown core, which rapidly undermined the material conditions conducive to the emergence of a organized women's movement.
First, suburbanization decapitated the women's movement by isolating its potential leadership (college-educated, middle-class women) from both the physical sites of paid employment and from their still employed working-class sisters. Middle-class women did not just leave paid employment, they were physically removed from even casual contact with potential employers by a significant commute. Middle class males could undertake this daily commute on the understanding that their wives remained at home to cover any emergent family and household responsibilities; wives could go no further than the local store lest they be needed to respond to calls from home or school. Consequently, the more articulate and educated a woman, the less likely she was to be found in physical proximity to work, and so the less able to enter-- let alone challenge -- the dominant discourse of work. Those women still in paid employment, on the other hand, were more likely to be living within the inner city and so too busy coping to provide the required intellectual leadership. Thus, suburbanization rapidly reversed the war-time potential for collaboration between different strata of women within the workplace.

Second, suburbanization isolated the feminist movement's potential leaders from each other. Whereas war-time employment, or even tenement housing, brought women together to compare the objective conditions of their lives and so allow for the emergence of class consciousness and action, the isolation of the single family dwelling made this much more difficult.

Isolated in the suburbs they felt uneasy and lonely and largely without guidance. More often than not, they were newly separated from their original families and the people they had grown up with. They were living new lives, different from those of their parents, with new and quite different expectations on the part of their husbands. Everything had to be learned. (Halberstam, 1993, 590)

Consequently, suburbanization left these middle class women highly vulnerable to the dominant discourse that depicted their legitimate class grievances in individual and psychological terms:

At this particular moment, it was impossible to underestimate the importance and influence of the women's magazines – the *Ladies Home Journal*, *Redbook*, *McCall's* and *Mademoiselle* – on middle class young women. … The magazines explained their new lives to them: how to live, how to dress, what to eat, why they should feel good about themselves and their husbands and children. Their sacrifices, the women's magazines emphasized, were not really sacrifices, they were about fulfillment. All doubts were to be conquered. … Those women who were not happy and did not feel fulfilled were encouraged to think that the fault was theirs and that they were the exception to blissful normality. That being the case, women of the period rarely shared their doubts, even with each other. If anything, they tended to feel guilty about any qualms they had: Here they were living better then ever – their husbands were making more money than ever, and there were even bigger, more beautiful cars in the garage and appliances in the kitchen. Who were they to be unhappy? (Halberstam, 1993, 590-592)

In contrast with the tenement, whose paper-thin walls made privacy and therefore the pretense of the perfect family impossible to maintain, the prosperity of suburbia demanded that women not only keep up with the Jones, but project a family image of "Leave it to Beaver" contentment. The reality was often otherwise, as women found themselves isolated, deskill
(thanks to various "labour saving devices" in the home) and alienated, but unable to articulate their grievances in class terms.

**McCarthyism**

Although not the only casualty of McCarthyism, gender issues were to be treated in the cold war era as subversive and Un-American.

"The dominant discourses of work and family did not shift to reflect individual women’s personal level of development until the rebirth of radicalism in the post-Vietnam era (and even now gains are tenuous) due to the strength of the emergent discourse of the cold war, with its attendant discourse of masculinity, whose necessary corollary was a highly constrained view of femininity (Runte and Mills, 2003)."

McCarthyism is an important but often over-rated aspect of the cold war era. By focusing on McCarthyism, one risks distracting attention from the far more fundamental role of mainstream patriarchal discourses in disrupting the emergence of a post-war feminist movement. Although McCarthyism clearly created a dangerous climate for any critical discourse, attributing the failure of the feminist movement primarily to the fear of the UnAmerican Activities Committee is to confuse the symptom for the disease, and to imply that the women's movement failed for lack of courage. Senator McCarthy and his followers were clearly taping into deeply rooted American beliefs, and simply enforced the pre-existing work/family discourse. Just as it is not a chilly climate in a workplace, or even explicit personnel policies, that enforce women's exclusion, but rather the systemic structures as revealed in the dominate patriarchal discourses which render female inclusion more literally unthinkable, the chill of McCarthyism is more symptomatic than casual. While the increased media and academic conservatism under McCarthyism may have effectively denied women a convenient outlet for the articulation of a radical feminism, and while McCarthyism generated its own gendered discourse (Runte and Mills, 2003) these acted as support to, rather than cause of, the hegemonic work/family discourse.

**Conclusion**

The hegemony of discourse is rooted in historical context. The emergence of the discourse of work-family conflict within management theory and practice in the cold war era reflects the dominant discourses of that era. The potential for a radical shift in the labour market positioning of women was curtailed as a deliberate post-war policy to support the repatriation of the male warrior. This policy reflects an entrenchment of the positioning of the male as worker, the female as help-mate that did not in fact shift during the war period despite an increased presence of women in market work during the war. How women enacted their responsibility to "help out" changed during the war, not their actual role. Not all women readily embraced a return to domesticity or to more poorly paid and less prestigious positions. To subvert challenges to this discourse, a companion discourse of conflict emerged in management theory that demarked the spheres of work and family as incompatible and the experience of boundary crossing as destructive.

Post-war prosperity also contributed to the demarcation of the boundaries of work and home by creating the perception that, not only was the place of women in the home, but also that the home was a desirable place to be. Suburbanization isolated women, thus effectively shutting down opportunity for collective action. The marriage of social conditions and the persistence of
pre-existing roles to a context of suppression of dissent characterized by McCarthyism served to limit the role of women in market work and suppress the potential for challenge to the dominant discourses of work-family within management theory.

The discourse of work-family conflict that presents work and family as incommensurable spheres remains unchallenged in management theory. That this conflict discourse remains rooted in the social context of fifty years past should serve to emphasize a need to challenge this hegemonic paralysis in management theory.

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