Critical Organisational Psychology

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Critical Organisational Psychology

Matthew McDonald and David Bubna-Litic

Social psychology has had a significant impact on the way we think about organisational life. Flick through any text book on organisational behaviour, introductory management or human resources and you will see, prominently featured, social psychology topics such as personality, attitudes, social identity, attribution, teams, leadership, decision-making, communication and conflict. These text books draw on a range of classic and contemporary social psychological conceptions such as the Big Five Factors, cognitive dissonance, social categorisation, social facilitation, persuasion, conformity and obedience, to name just a few.

Social psychologists can rightly feel a sense of achievement regarding their contribution to the scholarly understanding of organisational life. The impact of psychological theories applied at the social level stretches back to the early 1900s. Social psychological techniques were used in the recruitment and selection of men and women who served in World War I and II (Vinchur & Koppes, 2010). In the 1930s, the Australian social psychologist Elton Mayo conducted the now famous Hawthorn Studies, which instituted employee attitude surveys, and influenced the course of studies into motivation, job design and performance for decades to come. During World War II, the hugely popular Myers-Briggs Type Indicator personality test for example was

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developed to assist women to identify the kind of job for the war effort they would be most suited to (Briggs-Myers & Myers, 1995). In the 1950s, social psychologists undertook a range of organisational studies investigating teamwork, decision-making and leadership (McDonald & Bubna-Litic, 2012).

However, many of the theories and research drawn from social psychology are often uncritically taught in universities and are accepted and employed by organisational practitioners, many of whom are unaware its contested nature (e.g., Erington & Bubna-Litic, 2015). Important historical events and ongoing debates in social psychology around philosophical issues concerning its ontology, such as its individual/social split, and epistemology, such as the use of laboratory experiments, continue to cause dissent and separatism (Elms, 1975; Pancer, 1997; Parker, 1989; Stainton-Rogers, 2011). These are among many issues that tend to go unexamined in mainstream organisational behaviour textbooks.

An example of this can be seen in the use and application of personality theories and the significant industry that promotes the use of scaled questionnaires used to measure it. Personality scales purport to measure what becomes taken at face value and seen by practitioners as the primary cause of an individual's behaviour. Similarly, the use of scaled questionnaires used to measure personality are viewed as largely unproblematic and seen as reliable and valid measures for use in employee recruitment, selection and career development (e.g., Robbins & Judge, 2011). Despite the many questions that hang over the use of personality scales in the workplace, the majority of organisational behaviour textbooks typically downplay interpretation problems, often only highlighting the potential for employees to cheat or fake their answers (Vecchio, 2006).

In keeping with the overall theme of this handbook, the aim of this chapter is three fold: (1) to review the existing critical social psychology literature applied to organisations, termed here 'critical organisational psychology'; (2) discuss theoretical perspectives that critical social psychologists can draw on that build on the existing literature; and (3) report on some current trends. Each of these sections will discuss existing studies and point out, where appropriate, how they might contribute to new lines of research in the area of critical social psychology generally.

Critical Organisational Psychology

Although the body of literature in critical organisational psychology is modest in size there have been a number of key articles, chapters and books that provide insights into how different perspectives in critical social psychology

might be applied to the workplace. The critical perspective seeks to extend understanding by challenging core mainstream assumptions, and also by championing the ideas and views that do not fit within the current trajectory of mainstream research and thus is relegated to the periphery. In keeping with a focus on psychological processes, these critiques have sought to investigate assumptions about subjectivity in terms of the phenomenological experience of organisations and the way in which workers are positioned and subjected to power relations by governmental and scientific discourses—including those promoted by social psychology (Foucault, 1977; Willig, 2013; Wooffitt, 2005). In contrast to mainstream social psychological theory, the critical perspective seeks to link individual subjectivity with supra-individual organisational structures and societal institutions. These relationships are regarded as just as important to understanding what shapes and influences organisational behaviour as intra-psychic variables such as self-schemas, personality traits, attitudes and cognitive preferences.

Subjectivity

Although classical social theorists (e.g., Marx, Weber) have written extensively on the links between political economy, degraded workplace conditions and psychological alienation, the first social psychologist of the modern era to investigate these issues was Erich Fromm. Inspired by a range of radical humanistic philosophies including Marxism, existentialism and psychoanalysis, Fromm (1956/1991) made a number of critical observations concerning modern day work and its various modes of exploitation. What set Fromm apart was that he wrote on the limitations of mainstream social psychology theories, arguing that theories outside the sub-disciplines boundaries had much to add to the understanding of social behaviour. Fromm also criticised social psychology's unconscious moral attitudes and its unwillingness to engage in social criticism (Ingleby, 1991/2002).

Like other existentialists, social theorists and poststructuralists, Fromm (1956/1991) argued that the dissolution of traditional institutions in the modern era such as religion, gender roles, extended family, community and lifelong occupations had led to a greater reflexive awareness and emphasis on self-identity. Under modern conditions, self-identity had become a project to be invested in and worked on (see also Giddens, 1991). Modern society has also become dominated by a complex set of market-based relationships which imbricate its values throughout society, as a consequence, Sandel (2013) and Bauman (2007) argue, individuals have internalised its logic, commodifying

themselves in order to compete with others in the labour market. For Fromm (1947/2003, 1956/1991), this led to the emergence of a 'marketing orientated' character strategy, where individuals cultivate personality traits such as being cheerful, dependable, enterprising, reliable and ambitious, because they are valued by the market. Fromm argued that this led to an individualised form of alienation (as opposed to Marx's collective concept) in which self-identity is experienced and judged based on occupational and materialistic criteria (Prasad & Prasad, 1993).

Despite its rhetoric on increasing individual freedoms, a number of authors argue the market economy (neoliberalism) only pretends to enhance individual freedoms and is instead, essentially exploitative (Bourdieu, 1999; Chomsky, 1999; Lemke, 2001; Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005). Writers such as Foucault (1988, 1991) and those he has influenced (e.g., Dean, 2010; Lemke, 2001; Rose, 1998) have attempted to examine how neoliberalism maintains control through 'technologies of the self', market rationalities and the governing of mental life, or what is conceptualised as 'governmentality'.

Critical scholars have found a place in organisation studies by investigating how these forms of domination and power operate in the workplace within the context of neoliberalism and the way this shapes subjectivity. These scholars are uncovering how, through a complex system of transactions, the market ultimately favours one set of personality attributes over another (McDonald & Wearing, 2013). The market for human resources is seen as not simply determined by the preferences of the buyer, but in the market for labour it is the buyers' preferences for certain attributes that will determine what the market values. The concern of critical scholars is how deeply these preferences become internalised and how such attributes may become dominant in the formation of self-identity. Their concern is not simply limited to the cultivation of performative attributes but also how market values encourage the development of both narcissistic and competitive personality traits (Blackler & Brown, 1978; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2006; Cushman, 1995; Lasch, 1979; Manne, 2014). The effect of this on organisational life is that workers are often pitted against one another in what Lasch (1979, p. xv) describes as a war of competitive individualism and which Mandel and Novack (1970, p. 77) argue generates "unbridled individualism, egotism, and self-seeking. … The members of this society, whatever their status, have to live in an atmosphere of mutual hostility rather than solidarity".

In spite of writing in the 1950s, Fromm's ideas provide a basis for understanding the commodification of self-identity in the contemporary workplace. It explains, for example, the commodification of emotional intelligence which distinguishes those job applicants and workers who are emotionally less

intelligent and thus less worthy (Fineman, 2000, 2004), setting up a blueprint for a character regime that workers are required to live up to (Hughes, 2005). The commodification of self-identity is also linked to 'work and spend lifestyles', which have shown to lead to increased levels of stress, addiction, depression and anxiety disorders (McDonald, Wearing, & Ponting, 2008; Schor, 1999). At this stage, there are still many unanswered questions surrounding the commodification of self-identity in the workplace. For example: What is the experience of a commodified self? How deeply it is internalised? How has this technology shifted the way people perceive others in organisations? What are its outcomes in terms of wider issues, such as, prejudice, health and wellbeing?

More direct critiques of organisational psychology began to appear in the 1990s. Hollway (1991, 1998) for example employed a Foucauldian genealogy to trace the historical development of organisational psychology and its discourse at the beginning of the twentieth century, to its current day focus on psychometric testing, management coaching, enhancing motivation, leadership, organisational change and culture. Hollway argues that when organisational psychology is analysed from a broader historical perspective, it reveals how its status as a science is used as a power/knowledge to gain normative acceptance. Its operationalisation in the workplace effectively disciplines workers to think about their job roles and tasks in particular ways that align their subjectivities with owner/manager prerogatives. This has evolved through owner/managers selective appropriation of positivist scientific methods that promise efficiency and break jobs down into their smallest component parts, reconstruct them and then requires workers to fit into them. Workers must also submit to micromanagement and surveillance techniques in the measurement of quarterly or annual performance assessments where so-called objective measures are used that ignore the many factors that are outside the workers control but in which they are made to feel responsible for. Far from being an objective producer of cumulative knowledge, leading to the incremental improvement of organisational performance through enhanced people management, the application of many scientific psychological techniques to organisations are shaped and reshaped by dominant political and economic systems, scientific discourses and their power/knowledge.

In one of the first books on 'critical management studies', Steffy and Gimes (1992), like Hollway earlier, argued that personnel/organisational psychology seeks to produce normative accounts of organisational behaviour based on its theory which employs a neo-positivist epistemology and individualistic ontology. The authors argue that personnel/organisational psychology's adherence to this perspective restricts workplace democracy and participation by reducing the experience of organisational life down to simplistic analytical models that owner/managers use to control organisational behaviour

(e.g., happy versus productive). The result is delimited definitions of workplace motivation, stress and satisfaction because its inquiries are "confined only to those propositions that are empirically testable" (Steffy & Grimes, 1992, p. 184).

In the early 1980s, the term 'personnel management' was replaced with 'human resource management' (HRM). HRM seeks to provide a set of policies and practices for managing people that meet the needs of an organisations strategy. HRM and organisational psychology have become inextricably intertwined, with one influencing the other. Both are products of the current political zeitgeist that seeks increasingly centralised control, through the micro measurement of performance and selection, using personality and cognitive testing and behavioural grading systems, in order to rank individuals against each other (Steffy & Grimes, 1992). More recently, psychological techniques such as emotional intelligence and positive psychology have sought to capture and deploy people's emotional energies and authentic-selves to elicit greater engagement, commitment and performance (Fineman, 2004, 2006a; McDonald & O'Callaghan, 2008). HRM and its focus on strategy furthers managerial goals, yet fails to call into question the goals themselves that may run counter to the needs of workers (Islam & Zyphur, 2009). Organisational psychologists, in conjunction with owner/managers, maintain strict hierarchies of authority that allow existing inequalities to define job descriptions and social relations (see also Parker, 2007).

McDonald and Bubna-Litic (2012) conducted a review of the various critiques of mainstream social psychology's application to organisations, finding that critical scholars typically focus on four main issues that undermine the potential liberating effects of organisational life. These include (1) social psychology's valorisation of positivist (experimental) research methods; (2) its identification with owner/manager perspectives on workplace issues and problems; (3) its focus on intra-psychic variables or internal mental states when accounting for organisational problems, while overlooking external/macro societal factors; and (4) the absence of a clear moral and ethical framework for determining workplace research and practice. This approach ignores the imperatives of most workers who regard the measurement and facilitation of intra-psychic variables such as motivation, self-esteem and matching their personality traits with job characteristics as less important when compared with the more dynamic and influential issues of power, justice, equality, job security and employee relations with management (see also Steffy & Grimes, 1992). Mainstream social psychology's lack of reflexivity has led to a lazy attitude towards key moral issues within its research and practice. As a consequence, there is little commitment to inform and critique industrial and employee relations policies that have led to the degrading

of workplace conditions in many industry sectors of the economy (see also Huszczo, Wiggins, & Currie, 1984; Steffy & Grimes, 1992; Zickar, 2001).

Organisational psychology is caught up in a web of power relations that privilege the views of owners/managers seeking to decrease costs and increase profits—regardless of whether they exploit workers in the process. Since the 1980s, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom, working conditions have deteriorated as governments in both countries have allowed neoliberal assumptions to dictate industrial and employee relations policy. This has led to reduced rates of pay, the weakening of trade unions, increased job insecurity, longer and more intense working hours, greater casualisation based on short-and/or fixed-term contracts and reduced social security provision (Bourdieu, 1999, 2000; Gorz, 1999; Thompson, 2003). Organisational psychology is not responsible for these circumstances, however, its unwillingness to criticise the political and economic policies that have led to these conditions has meant it has become an apologist for them. As Hepburn (2003, p. 153) writes, traditional psychologists "believe that forays into the world of politics would only serve to puncture the illusion of a value-free approach towards its research".

Social Identity Theory

Given the highly social nature of organisations and the contemporary job design focus on project teams, it is no surprise that Social Identity Theory (SIT) has become a popular approach for understanding aspects of organisational behaviour. The number of books, chapters and journal articles on SIT applied to organisations attest to its popularity (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Chattopadhyay, Tluchowska, & George, 2004; Haslam & van Dick, 2011; Haslam, van Knippenberg, Platow, & Ellemers, 2003; Hogg & Terry, 2003). Some of the findings from these studies suggest that higher levels of commitment and feelings of stress are both correlated to and mediated by positive group-based identifications within organisations.

SIT was introduced by Henri Tajfel who, along with his colleagues, sought to herald in a more 'social' European approach to social psychology, challenging the inherent individualism of US approaches (Wetherell, 1996). However, Tajfels radical beginnings have de-evolved back into an individualistic asocial approach whose focus is now predominately based on the theory and philosophy of social cognition (e.g., Dashtipour, 2012; Jenkins, 2014; Parker, 1997; Schiffmann & Wicklund, 1992; Wetherell, 1996).

An early critique of SIT applied to organisational behaviour was conducted by Marshall and Wetherell (1989), who investigated career and gender iden-

tity using discourse analytic methods. The aim of the study was to understand how "people construct their sense of self in different contexts in relation to their occupations" (Marshall & Wetherell, 1989, p. 112). Employing a discourse analytic method exposed a number of limitations of the SIT approach. The participant's identification and conscious understanding of the social groups they belonged to lacked a unified set of characteristics. In other words, there was an absence of a "collectively shared stereotypic representation, image or consensus" of the legal profession they belonged to (Marshall & Wetherell, 1989, p. 114). SIT assumes the individual will seek to enhance their self-esteem by trying to gain membership to groups of a higher status; however, the stereotypic view of women as inferior legal professionals was accepted by the majority of the women in the study. The study concluded with the finding that when participants viewed themselves as members of a particular group, their perception of that membership was not stable over time and place (see also Condor, 1996).

The most recent addition to the critique of SIT applied to organisations is Dashtipour (2015), whose book chapter begins with a history of the conceptualisation of groups in social psychology. Dashtipour (2015) along with Wetherell (1996), agree that Tajfels initial leanings with SIT were towards social constructionism. SIT was initially regarded as having critical theoretical credentials due to its focus on "prejudice, oppression, conflict and social change" (Dashtipour, 2015, p. 186). SIT's move towards a greater a focus on social cognition led to a breakaway group of scholars who developed a discursive approach to social psychology underpinned by social constructionism and discourse theory. Despite its often trumpeted emphasis on groups as opposed to individuals, SITs application to organisations is still fraught with a number of problematic features. Dashitpour (2015, p. 192) argues that even when SIT is used to emphasise politics and the social nature of mind and behaviour, it is still based on an "instrumentally rational view of the organisation". This is due to its positivist research agenda, which "takes part in the managerial mission to direct and control behaviour" (Dashtipour, 2015, p. 192).

Critical Alternatives

Due to the burgeoning nature of critical organisational psychology, there is significant potential to conduct new lines of research. Some of these have already been discussed above. What follows is an outline of some additional topics and theoretical approaches for interested researchers (word limit only allows for a select few, however, there are many more).

Labour Process Theory

Early labour process theory (LPT) evolved from a broad Marxist framework which sought to expose the hidden relationship between the ownership of capital and the social construction of workplace reality. From a Marxist viewpoint, the crux of labour relations is the ideological control of the process, by which labour relations are negotiated and become objectified into a seemingly limited set of choices. This contributes to the oppression of one class by another. Braverman's (1976) *Labor Monopoly Capital* sparked a stream of critical thinking and theorising about labour relations, which evolved over time, along with new forms of capitalist production and management. LPT contributes to critical organisational psychology in several ways.

Firstly, it opens up a more sociological focus to include analyses of the relationship of class and, more generally, market relationships within the general political economy on the workplace. The key import of studies on LPT has been to facilitate the recognition that managerial action either ignored or obscured the interrelationship between capital and labour. Research has highlighted how managers utilised a range of strategies to essentially maintain control over the potentially countervailing interests of labour. In particular, scientific management was identified as a conscious and systematic set of techniques that divided the conception and control of work (managerial function) from its execution (workers function), which reduced the worker to an "automaton and management became practically omnipotent through its abuse of science" (Tadajewski, Maclaran, Parsons, & Parker, 2011, p. 152). Under this regime, workers are controlled and disciplined in the name of efficiency and greater profits for shareholders.

Second, LPT has contributed to debates around the conception of labour as a factor of production, which must be negotiated with, suggesting that it leads to a series of efforts to mitigate the power of labour within the context of a rapidly globalising workplace. LPT seeks to expose the unequal social relationships where the power of the working population to control their working lives is limited. LPT has sought to expose how management thinking does not challenge the fundamental anti-pathetic relationship between capital and labour, but rather has sought to develop more sophisticated control techniques, which do not fundamentally challenge the power imbalance in the employment relationship. These can be seen in popular HRM practices that attempt to co-opt the hearts and minds of workers, variously labelled High Performance or High Involvement Work Systems. These technologies are designed to stimulate greater engagement, performance, creativity and

commitment. However, these systems have never been immune from ratio-nalisations, closures, scaling down, low-cost competition and stock market pressures (Thompson, 2003). Despite the investments in time and money these HRM systems require, they have done little to improve the workers lot given that many continue to experience "increases in job dissatisfaction, work intensification, hours worked, job insecurity and social inequality" (Tadajewski et al., 2011, p. 77).

In the 1990s, labour process scholars steadily moved away from Marx's theory of class conflict, yet maintained his focus on false consciousness by employing Foucaudian notions of subjectivity as the basis of their interpre-tations. Representative of this trend, Walsh and Bahnisch (2002) sought to question how workers liberate themselves from false consciousness. Mainstream social psychology is based on liberal modernist assumptions that people are free-thinking, free-acting agents who are cognizant of the ideolo-gies that influence their thinking. In contrast, Engels believed that the accep-tance of capitalist ideology had become unconscious and so pervasive that it was rarely questioned by the people affected by it (Fromm, 1962/2009). The degradation of workplace conditions is often falsely conceived of as a 'natural law' prescribing that the owners of capital and managers will always have a prerogative over job design that workers must accept and who are forced to compete with other workers for scarce resources (Augoustinos, 1999; Davies, 2014; Mandel & Novack, 1970). Further analysis on this topic is required in order to better understand the subjective features of false consciousness within the context of the individualistic and competitive ideology of neoliber-alism (Walsh & Bahnisch, 2002; see also Davies, 2014). Augoustinos (1999, p. 295) argues that the concept of false consciousness has been misappropri-ated by mainstream social psychologists who have constructed it simply as a "psychological-cognitive phenomenon located in individuals' heads, rather than as a socially emergent product of a capitalist society".

Global Workplace Technologies

Social theory offers a number of important insights into contemporary glo-balised work providing a rich source of perspectives for critical social psychol-ogists to draw upon. Key social theorists include George Ritzer and Zgymunt Bauman. Max Weber (1922/1978) coined the term 'iron cage' to describe what he believed to be the increasing rationalisation of modern life through the growth of bureaucracies and their power to control many aspects of day-to-day life. Employing Weber's conception of rationalisation, Ritzer (2014)

extends this view to modern forms of job design, which he convincingly argues (for many organisations) are based on the hugely successful fast-food chain McDonald's.

While many knowledge-based organisations in Western countries attempt to design jobs along neo-human relations lines by instituting various HRM policies and practices, there has been a parallel upsurge in the use of scientific management approaches (Taylorism), particularly in low-skilled service sector organisations. Ritzer (2014) coined the term 'McDonalisation' to refer to these rational approaches where every aspect of a job task is prescribed right down to the greeting one receives when approaching a fast-food counter or telephoning a banking or insurance call-centre.

Ritzer (2014) examined the McDonald's job design template, finding that its basic principles and technologies have subsequently been applied to a range of other service sector industries such as supply chain management, retail and tourism. Working life in these service sectors is frequently routine, repetitive, temporary, low skilled and low paid. Ritzer (2014) contends that four key techniques characterise the McDonaldisation process: (1) Efficiency: the most optimal method to conduct a workplace task, (2) Calculability: every workplace task should be quantifiable, (3) Predictability: workers provide standardised uniform services, (4) Control: workers are trained to behave in standardised uniform ways.

McDonaldisation, like its scientific management predecessor, has been responsible for the deskilling of workers and similarly conceives of work as something that is controlled by owner/managers. Under McDonalisdation, workers are given little opportunity to adjust, amend or redesign their jobs, rather their role is predetermined and set out in a standardised manual. McDonaldisation has been shown to increase productivity, but more importantly reduce labour costs, because labour and labourers are made interchangeable, cheap to train, cheap to replace and easy to control. They are good at making 'homogenous products' for consumers who desire standardised products wherever they go (Grugulis, 2007, p. 5). McDonaldised jobs are usually devoid of career and other characteristics that make them meaningful, so that such jobs are referred to as McJobs, which are defined as "low-pay, low-prestige, low-dignity, low benefit, no-future jobs in the service sector" (Coupland, 1991, p. 5).

Again the separation of conception and execution is based on the power/knowledge of elites, whose interests lie behind strategies of efficiency and labour saving technologies. Rather than fitting work around the needs of workers, the McDonald's approach to job design frames workers within capitalist relations, who think in terms of free market values, and where other

possibilities of human potential is not a consideration (Hollway, 1998; Islam & Zyphur, 2009). Job design presumes that both workers and organisational performance criteria are naturally aligned in the same way that economic rationalists believe market values are the ultimate expression of freedom. However, both are aligned with elite interests, the former on managerial assumptions about worker behaviour and the latter with the owners of capital.

The McJob phenomenon has been likened to the conditions of the 'precariat', that is, the group of low- and middle-income earners who now work at jobs that are insecure, project based, casual, flexible and short term. This idea fits with Bauman's (2000) contention that we are currently living in 'liquid modern' times where life is precarious and conditions of uncertainty are normal. The primary focus of Bauman's conception of liquid modernity assumes a shift away from a 'producer society' to a 'consumer society' (McDonald & Wearing, 2013). Yet the concept of liquid modernity provides a number of useful insights for a wider understanding of the relationship between organisations and subjectivity (Clegg & Baumeler, 2010, 2014; Wearing & Hughes, 2014). Like Fromm, Bauman (2007) believes that in order to survive workers are required to commodify their personalities in order to compete and succeed in a market-based economy. Here the values of enterprise, flexibility, extraversion and entrepreneurship are valued because they are consistent with corporate goals, but also require the application of positive emotional energies such as passion, a positive attitude and the display of one's authentic-self (Binkley, 2014).

Critical social psychologists are ideally placed to contribute to these areas of research by examining how workers adapt to social change, in this case changes in job design technologies and the ideologies that drive it. While McDonalisation incorporates many scientific management principles, it is a quantum shift from the original because workers are required to conduct social interactions based on a predetermined approach, as well as undertake positive emotional labour to gain a competitive edge for the organisation and to demonstrate passion and commitment for the job. This is a substantial widening of the ambit of labour relations from the scientific management era of the early 1900s where workers were primarily confined to the factory floor and where social interaction were frowned upon as non-productive; now even social interactions are specified. Social change, changes in technology and their influence on subjectivity is an issue that mainstream social psychology has failed to properly grapple with. In the current era, we generally think of new technologies in the form of information devices; however, new technologies can be applied to human beings as well. As Rose (1996, p. 313) notes, the way in which we think about ourselves as "creatures of freedom, of liberty,

of personal powers, of self-realization" are a product of human technologies which are any "assembly structured by a practical rationality governed by a more or less conscious goal".

Critical Organisational Psychology: Workplace Applications

Arguably three main factors characterise critical social psychology: a focus on the social; an analysis of power relations; and the championing of oppressed disempowered groups such as the poor, unemployed, homeless, young people, indigenous, disabled, refugees, mentally ill, homosexuals and single mothers. C. Wright Mills (1959/2000) summed up oppression when he argued that social structures, institutions, discourses and ideologies are the cause of people's marginalisation, as opposed to faulty thinking or defective personalities.

Understanding the workings of power relations in organisations is therefore key to successfully fighting oppression stemming from inequitable practices. However, resisting and challenging entrenched power relations and the oppression they exert is always going to be a challenging task, even when that task is confined to a single organisation. It is likely to come at a cost for the individual or the collective wishing to take this challenge on. One only needs to look at whistle blowers to see the sacrifices and great costs that come from upholding principles of justice, fairness and equity. High-profile examples include Edward Snowdon and Chelsea Manning pointing to both the sacrifice, but also the complex moral dilemmas of acting against the interests of the state.

Another example closer to home is Professor Ian Parker, one of the pioneers of critical psychology. Professor Parker became the focus of international media attention for being sanctioned by his employer Manchester Metropolitan University for questioning management and implicitly its power to make decisions. Parker contested their policy regarding academic workloads and the appointment process of academic staff in his department. Parker, a one-time official of the University and Colleges Union, was disciplined by the University for Gross Misconduct and asked to apologise for his actions. Parker ended up resigning, stating that he and his research programme had been undermined, no doubt as punishment because he was prepared to speak out on an important issue. The issue of academic workloads has become one of the most contentious currently facing academics all over the world who are been increasingly stretched by their university's to 'do more with less', while

performance expectations continue to rise sharply. The Vice Chancellor of Manchester Metropolitan University was presented with a petition containing 3700 names supporting Professor Parker's stance and his commitment to scholarship, the names on the petition included other notable scholars, students and practitioners from around the world. On top of this, the university received negative worldwide press over the issue. Yet despite this pressure the Vice Chancellor remained unchanged in his position, Parker was wrong to act in the way he did and therefore needed to be punished. This example illustrates the difficulties in challenging power relations and the sacrifice that people are required to make when they take on organisational oppression. While most of us consider ourselves to be critical psychologists, would we be willing to make the same sacrifices as Professor Parker in order to stand by the principles we espouse to others in our writing?

While there are certainly many less dramatic methods and techniques that that can be employed to challenge organisational power and oppression, such as becoming active in a trade union, building grass roots political coalitions, questioning and resisting unfair decisions, conducting participatory action research, conducting go slows or withholding critical information, they may not always be particularly successful in truly challenging the power of capital (e.g., Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Geoffrey, 2002). As Thompson (2003) argues, it is difficult for employers to act with justice, fairness and equality when global political economic forces are designed to meet the needs of capital as opposed to the needs of the people. The title of Chomsky's (1999) book *Profits Over People: Neoliberalism and the Global Order* says it all. The struggle between capital and people in organisations is an age-old issue that stretches back hundreds of years. It preoccupied the life of Marx and Engels and more recently Pierre Bourdieu. Challenging these forces is really what is required if the needs of workers are to take priority over profits in the organisational equation.

Current Trends

Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is an American development that has transformed the orientation of the discipline as well as having a significant effect on a number of other allied fields such organisational behaviour (i.e., positive organisational behaviour and positive organisational scholarship) and practices such as organisational coaching. Broadly, positive psychology is a research framework that seeks to prioritise positive states, outcomes and processes at both

an individual and collective level. According to Roberts (2006, p. 292): "The over-arching emphasis of this work is on identifying individual and collective strengths (attributes and processes) and discovering how such strengths enable human flourishing (goodness, generativity, growth, and resilience; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005)". Positive psychology distinguishes itself from related areas, such as the positive thinking movement, by claiming to be scientific and evidence based. It uses its scientific credentials to compete with other organisation improvement technologies.

Critical perspectives on positive psychology pick up on several concerns. The first sits within the broad critique of the assumption that it is possible to isolate some essential universal elements of an individual from their social context. Second, the critical view is suspicious of the assumption that positive and negative are easily distinguished. The division of the world into good (positive) and evil (negative) has a long history in Christian cultures. Positive psychology sets itself up as a counter discourse to the historical focus on psychopathology. One of its key concepts is that a focus on the negative can be viewed as negative thinking and thus is a problem of human cognition. Critical psychologists doubt that human cognition can be managed separately from its inputs and their work highlights the tendency of positive psychologists to evaluate human behaviour as either positive or negative in terms of organisational goals. In this, critical psychologists are cautious about the tendency of research to seek performative justifications akin to the old human relations maxim that 'happy workers are productive workers'. There is a danger that being happy or positive is regarded as an individual choice, irrelevant to context and in particular conditional on the acceptance of the status quo in terms of social and institutional structures. Obviously, unhappiness is a motivation for change but a motivation for change could be a counter discourse to that of management. The third is concerned about the way power is exercised in the context of social organisation where knowledge is regarded not as neutral but is tied into linguistic structures that favour certain forms of subjectivity and regimes of control (Fineman, 2006a, 2006b; McDonald & O'Callaghan, 2008). Thus, critical researchers concerns around positive psychology are with how it positions itself within the broader discourses of organisational knowledge, representing itself as having a positive research agenda that is evidence based.

Quantification of evidence is a form that has good currency in the contest for research funding; however, this approach to research comes with claims of an exclusive insight into the positive domain of life. In line with Foucault, we ask, what types of knowledge and experience do they wish to exclude? The concern is that positive psychology is an attempt to define an entire pro-

gramme dictating what is and is not first rate science, decided upon by a group of insiders certified by each other whose standards must be adopted (Taylor, 2001). This polarisation of human life and scientific research can be seen as a barely veiled agenda to privilege one set of choices over another, by setting out the consequences of such choices as being essentially generative (e.g., life-building, capability-enhancing, capacity-creating) (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003) and the others as not. These invoke a narrowed view of organisational life which could be easily solved were everyone to focus their energy in the directions they point to. Its seeks to exclude views that do not fit within its purview and which seem to fit more with an American cultural institutional agenda closely tied to the economic imperatives of neoliberalism, where, for example, politicians regularly judge research as not being valuable to society/economy (Binkley, 2014).

Critical Management Studies

McDonald and Bubna-Litic (2012) and Dashtipour's (2015) work embrace critical management studies (CMS) as both a source and basis for conducting research in critical organisational psychology. CMS includes a broad set of reflexive practices, both methodological and epistemological, in organisational and management studies. CMS developed out of a range of affinities between a broad spectrum of critical stances and provides a space for dialogue about radical alternatives that question established relations of power, control, domination and ideology under contemporary neoliberal capitalism. Arguably, CMS has been an outlet for a range of social scientists who found their home in business schools paralleling a long-term decline in funding to social science research and teaching programmes. In many ways, CMS mirrors the state of disarray in left-wing politics in the early twenty-first century, where a strong suspicion of totalising narratives has encouraged a lack of common ground necessary for a united opposition to the neoliberal agenda, even after the 2008 global financial crisis and the deep economic recession that followed (Couch, 2011). This can be seen in debates about the relevance and marginalisation of CMS, in particular the concern regarding the lack of influence that critical research has had on practice. Thus, CMS has become a broad umbrella to "challenge prevailing relations of domination" (Alvesson, Bridgman, & Willmott, 2011, p. 1), including those who represent marginalised groups in society, such as low-income workers, women, sexual minorities and also those who see new avenues towards liberation, representation and empowerment though the documenting and understanding the mechanisms of power and oppression.

A strong element of the critical perspective is the view that knowledge is incomplete without openness to different perspectives that challenge mainstream ontologies and epistemologies. Thus, it embraces a radical doubt regarding the possibility of neutrality and universality. These two stances remain suspicious of taken-for-granted forms of thinking, particularly in organisation behaviour, which they identify as inescapably located within existing historical, economic, cultural, social and political contexts (Alvesson et al., 2011; Grey & Willmott, 2005; Tadajewski et al., 2011).

An important debate in CMS revolves around the concern that critical research has rather little influence on what managers do in practice. Conflicts emerge within CMS because the more activist groups see others as 'armchair critics' who have failed to embody their espoused critical stance. However, the same criticism is levelled at management studies in general (Augier & March, 2007; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). Overall, CMS seeks to 'denaturalise' concepts and theories, reflexively surfacing hidden assumptions regarding value systems, which affect the meaning and interpretation of research. For example, a common interest is to reveal the power relations that structure and maintain inequality in the workplace.

Dashitour (2015, p. 193) suggests that CMS obliges social psychologists to take a systems wide perspective that "influence management logics, perceptions and cognitions in organisations". That seeking to solve managerial problems by employing a perspective based on positivist approaches to prediction and control will only further reduce the freedoms of workers; instead, the focus for social psychologists should be on the politically charged and often contradictory nature of organisations under the political economy of neoliberalism. As we ourselves have previously argued, CMS has the potential to provide the basis for new research agendas for critical social psychologists to follow as well as potential collaborations (McDonald & Bubna-Litic, 2012), particularly where social psychological topics in organisations remain under researched by social theorists and CMS scholars. These include critical social psychology's perspectives on prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, aggression, attitudes, conformity, group processes and helping behaviours.

Summary

Critical social psychologists have so far made only infrequent forays into the world of organisations, critiquing mainstream social psychological theories and practices such as the micro measurement of workers through the process of recruitment, selection and performance management and the privileging

of certain personality traits and emotional behaviours in line with owner/manager prerogatives. There are two main established areas of study that analyse organisations, which share an affinity with the principles of critical social psychology. These include classic (Marx, Weber) and contemporary social theory (Braverman, Ritzer, Bauman) and CMS. The brief analysis of these two fields was designed to provide an understanding of how critical social psychology can contribute to a deeper understanding of the subjective experience of false consciousness, McDonaldisation and liquid modernity. In return, critical social psychology can bring new perspectives to these fields through its expertise in critiquing mainstream models of prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination and so on in organisations. Contributing new knowledge to these concepts is important given the long and continuing exploitation of workers by organisations and the way in which organisations shape social structures and institutions which influence social behaviour. In conclusion, the key question remains, how do we better translate an understanding of power relations in organisations into practical actions that do not come at such a cost to those willing to challenge them?

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