



Gender, Work and Organization

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Women, Collectivism and Wellbeing

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This stream calls for papers that critically analyse the role of the collective in employee wellbeing, and particularly women, including but not limited to aging and immigrant women.

There are few that would argue that while women have progressed in paid work in many countries there are still gaps in how gender in work and organisations is understood, researched and acted upon. One such example is the concept of wellbeing and its manifestation in the workplace especially in relation to improved performance (Spence, 2015). For some organisations this is viewed as the icing on the cake in their toolbox of human resource strategies (Guest, 2017; Laine, 2015). However, as some jurisdictions introduce the concept of work-related stress into health and safety legislation, there has been a flurry of renewed interest in not just the health but also the wellbeing of employees.

The concept of wellbeing is contested, and the wellbeing literature has been criticised because it has largely failed to consider the broader psychosocial view of work and instead focused on the individual's wellbeing, laying 'blame' for poor outcomes on the individual's capacity and characteristics, such as 'resilience' (Guest, 2017). A further critique of the wellbeing literature is the assumption that wellbeing is a homogenous experience across a homogenous worker, the typical 'male' worker. Scarce research has investigated the role of gender in wellbeing for employees. Along with disrupting the 'ideal worker' by interrogating gender, other absences include gender diverse/LGBTIQ+ and Indigenous workers, aging workers, migrant workers and those with a disability (Brougham, Haar, and Roche, 2015; Foster, 2017).

We argue that a shift in focus is needed to look at the role of the collective in relation to wellbeing: how can organised and informal groups of workers challenge the managerial wellbeing narrative that serves to individualise wellbeing and reduce it to individual coping strategies? This will provide the critical lens necessary to fully understand the processes and power play that impact on employee wellbeing at work and within organisations. Furthermore, this critical lens must include a gendered

analysis that engages with specific conditions/practices that diminish women's wellbeing at work, for example, sexual harassment, everyday sexism/racism and other insidious forms of oppression which would expand the debate about workplace wellbeing.

A logical step is to leverage research on unions and their role in the employment relationship, as unions' primary goal is to protect and improve workers' conditions and wages. Also to consider is the role of health and safety representatives which may also be collective agents. There has been considerable work on unions' role in health and safety, parental leave entitlements and flexible work arrangements (Ravenswood & Markey, 2011; Williamson, 2014; Heery, 1996). Research has also looked at women's representation and structures within unions themselves (Parker & Douglas, 2010; Brigden, 2013). Further research has also shown a connection between collective activity and general wellbeing at work – however this latter research has failed to take a gender lens to its analysis (Knudsen, Busck and Lind, 2011). Collectivism (be that formal union structures or otherwise) enables a voice in workplaces and may well provide a point of advocacy in the improvement of workers' wellbeing (Brougham, Haar, and Roche, 2015; Macky & Boxall, 2009). But what of women, and gender diverse people and their wellbeing?

This stream seeks papers that critically analyse the role of the collective in employee wellbeing, in particular for women and wider gender diversity. While the collective is traditionally understood as union representation, critical papers that explore the role of other collective structures within work and organisations, such as staff networks or collective civil society groups (for example, Equal Pay Coalitions, women's centres, workers centres) would also be welcome. Some suggestions are:

- Union role in wellbeing & gender diversity
- Union role in women, equality, harassment
- Unions & work/life balance
- Union ability to bring a critical eye – a strength of unions
- Disability and wellbeing/wellbeing programmes
- Historic perspective on women, collectivism and well being
- LGBTIQ+ issues and collectivism and well being
- Other collective groups such as staff networks & staff advocacy groups and their role in supporting wellbeing & gender.

For submission details go to: www.mq.edu.au/events/gwosydney

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