

# **‘How Could Management Let This Happen?’ Gender, Unpaid Work and Industrial Relations in the Nonprofit Social Services Sector**

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## **Introduction**

In the ‘developed’ world, the nonprofit or voluntary sector claims to be, and to some extent has been, a sector with a less formalized and non-antagonistic industrial relations culture which some claim makes it more progressive (Courtney and Hickey, 2016; Hemmings, 2011). Progressive is defined as promoting or favoring progress toward better conditions and relations and/or new policies, ideas, or methods (Capulong, 2006). Factors contributing to the image of progressive include the sector’s putative commitment to staff participation in decision making and in a commitment to equity and social justice. These factors can result in more horizontal decision making and supervision processes, claims to more ‘caring’ work cultures, and service user, staff and community participation in policy development and service delivery (Eikenberry, 2009). Participation generally takes a gendered character in the nonprofit social services sector (NPSSNPSS) where management and workers expect that the predominantly female staff will work well beyond their paid hours in ways that are not dissimilar to expectations of boundless, unpaid female care work in the home and community (Authors, 2012; Charlesworth, 2010; Themudo, 2010). In this article, we use the terms nonprofit and voluntary sector to refer to the sector that exists outside of the public sector and private market. Though some collapse this sector into the larger public or private sector, it merits investigation as a distinct arena operating on a distinctive ethos of altruism, participation and social care (Van Til, 2008). This sector

operates outside the private market as it does not accumulate a surplus or profit, though it increasingly adopts logics and practices from the private sector (Davies 2008). It also operates outside the public sector as most organisations operate as independent nonprofit corporations with their own governance structures and Board of Directors. Currently in Canada, 10.5% of the labour force is employed in the NPSS and 7.7 % in Scotland (Levy-Ajzenkopf, 2013; Scottish Social Services Council, 2015).

In the context of austerity policies<sup>1</sup> and work intensification, some of the predominantly female workforce in the nonprofit sector have joined and/or organized unions where representation did not already exist, and sometimes took strike action in an attempt to defend themselves and service users against cutbacks (Author B, 2008; Simms, 2007; Capulong, 2006). In contrast to the image of a flexible and inclusive, non-market sector in which all participants (workers, service users and community members) are respected and invited to participate in decision making, these union struggles are often bitter, divisive and underscore an increasingly formalized, commercialized, antagonistic relationship between management and workers. As Peters and Masaoka (2000) note, the same factors – government cutbacks, increased community need, greater competition for funds – create both the conditions for unionisation in the nonprofit sector and the pressure on management to oppose it (316).

This article explores recent strike action in two highly gendered nonprofit social services agencies who had long term union agreements, a history of labour peace (upwards of twenty years) and a reputation for participatory, cooperative IR cultures. Drawing on qualitative interview data collected in case studies in two liberal welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 2013), namely Scotland and Canada, the article investigates a management shift resulting from government funding restraints (passed on down to the line to agencies, workers and service

users), as well as a concomitant shift in industrial relations culture in which management moved away from more cooperative, participatory approaches to more hostile, oppositional approaches. Drawing on the following three components - - the voices of workers in our data, mobilisation theory (Kelly 1998) and feminist political economy - - the article analyses union-management relations in under-funded, contracted-out government services in both countries studied. The objectives of the article are to explore:

1. whether conditions still exist for a progressive culture of management-union relations given widespread restructuring and what that means for this highly gendered sector;
2. mobilisation theory and feminist political economy, particularly in relation to gender and the NPSS;
3. whether austerity policies such as government funding cuts are leading to a possible convergence between private and nonprofit approaches to union-management relations.

The article argues that naturalized *expectations* that the female-majority workforce will provide care under any circumstance, provides opportunities for exploitation of the workforce as well as for social solidarity and resistance on the part of the workforce. Contexts and literature will be discussed in the first section of the article, followed by a short discussion of the study and a longer section in which the findings grouped and analysed thematically. The article concludes with discussion and conclusions regarding a possible convergence at several layers of policy, practice and everyday experience in NPSS care work.

## **Contexts and Theory**

## **Care Work and Gender**

It is now well accepted in the literature that care work, such as that examined in this article, is a highly feminized environment (England, 2005; Folbre, 2006; Newman, 2013). Feminist analyses draw attention to the ways that caring is seen to be women's natural passion and that the majority-female care staff are expected to work with few boundaries on their time and effort, and low expectations regarding pay and conditions (Rubery and Urwin, 2011; Rubery et al., 2011; Charlesworth, 2010; Themudo, 2009). Feminist political economy provides a way to link and contextualize the changing dynamics of everyday care work with larger policy trends and regimes, namely, how economic and political institutions shape and interact with gender regimes, work/care regimes and the 'doing' of gender in organisations (Feuvre and Roseneil, 2014; Vosko, 2002; Folbre, 2006). By 'doing' we are referring to everyday taken-for-granted practices and policies that recreate unequal, gendered relations in social contexts such as nonprofit social service workplaces. The larger policy trends impacting on the care work examined in this article include: contracting-out and state downsizing; New Public Management (NPM); austerity-policies; and industrial relations policy.

In the nonprofit social services, the gendered character of care work also interweaves with 1) chronic underfunding of the sector, precipitating a demand for cheap and/or free labour, 2) the voluntary ethic which encourages staff and community participation in decision making and mobilizing communities around their own needs, and 3) a sense that the nonprofit sector has been a more values-based sector in which one can work for fairness, service to others, and sometimes, social justice (Charlesworth, 2010; Authors, 2013; Van Til, 2008). These dynamics lay the groundwork for managers to invoke naturalized notions of women's capacity to provide

care under any conditions, thus stretching scarce resources and providing much needed services to increasingly desperate communities (Smith, 2007). Though some workers are not interested in decision making, most workers are willing to undertake unpaid work in order to feel a sense of personal integrity and meet the needs of service users (Rubery and Urwin, 2011; Nickson et al., 2008; Themudo, 2009).

### **Managerialism and NPM**

The shift from public to for-profit and nonprofit provision of social services and contracting-out as part of welfare state restructuring is now well documented (Davies, 2008; Newman, 2013; Tailby et al., 2011). This shift occurred alongside the introduction of competitive performance models originating in the private market, such as NPM. These models increased requirements from funded agencies for accountability metrics in the form of statistics and documentation of service units (Shields et al., 2005). Though a significant body of literature argues that NPM has not been monolithic and that restructured welfare states continue to reflect local strengths and structural differences (Bach and Bordogna, 2011; Hood and Peter, 2004), at the level of the nonprofit workplace a convergence consisting of numerous common trends can be identified.

In particular, managerialised metrics associated with NPM have placed the voluntary ethos in jeopardy, undermining its social care and social justice capacity in the name of cost-saving and efficiency (McDonald and Marston, 2002; Van Til, 2008). In an effort to document that government outcome targets have been met and thus secure ongoing funding, complex care processes have been distilled to their simplest elements and standardized (Rubery and Unwin, 2011; Tailby et al., 2011). This standardization removed a great deal of worker autonomy and

discretion; simultaneously transferring increased control to management. Practices that are difficult to quantify include open-ended, long-term processes such as relationship building, fostering equity and improving community participation have been fundamentally altered or eliminated (Aronson and Smith, 2011; Eikenberry, 2009; Smith, 2007). This shift in the labour process, or in the balance of worker-management workplace control (Thompson and Smith, 1995), represents responses to very real funding constraints, as cost reduction focused governments slash human service funding and require ever tighter contract compliance from funded agencies.

Asserting that they are trying to avoid job cuts and remain viable in the quasi-market of competitive contracting (with governments as the primary or single payer), for-profit and nonprofit management have passed along funding cuts to workers in the form of reductions to working hours, wages, benefits and pensions (supply-chain squeeze) and an increasing reliance on contract, part-time, temporary and casual forms of employment (Authors et al. 2014; Rubery and Unwin 2011). Some authors note the important role human service management can play in buffering the impacts of managerialism on staff and advocating with government for better conditions (Authors, 2014; Aronson and Smith, 2011; Beddoe, 2010). This literature also claims that management's loyalty should lie with the communities served by the agencies and with the staff who undertake care work, rather than with funders who provide inadequate resources, thus ensuring difficult work and service environments.

Data from our larger four-country study (Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Scotland) confirm that with the introduction of NPM-inspired efficiencies, forums in which management and staff met and developed shared agendas have been reduced or removed (Author A et al., 2010; Author A, 2004). These include: agency-wide staff meetings, annual or bi-annual staff

assemblies, multi-unit staff meetings, staff educationals, and peer supervision. These forums were the main place where shared agendas and the agency's political perspective on program and policy issues were developed between staff and management.

As opportunities for discussion and consensus building, they were the space where management and workers built a more progressive and informal IR culture. Though these forums continue to exist in reduced format in some agencies, there is rarely money included in government contracts to cover wages for attendance and so their future is difficult to ascertain (Eikenberry, 2009; McDonald and Marston, 2002). In addition, the growth of precarious work in the sector means many workers hold multiple jobs and may not have the time or inclination to attend a meeting for which they will not be paid (Shields et al., 2014).

### **Unions in the Nonprofits**

With regard to unions in nonprofit agencies, a significant North American literature focuses on the 'dissonance' between managers who claim to support the right to unionize, and yet adopt an antagonistic response to collectivism among their own workforce (Author A, 2010; Kimmel, 2006; Capulong, 2006). As Peters and Masaoka (2000) note, many nonprofit managers 'view themselves as pro-labour yet struggle to articulate reasons that nonprofits should be exempt from unionisation but other organisations should not' (309). Capulong (2006) comes to the same conclusions and advocates industry-wide unionisation to halt inter-agency competition for funds and the race to the bottom (12). Rather than involve workers in participatory, social justice-seeking processes, once the hallmark of the nonprofit ethos, Kimmel (2006) notes that nonprofits

often employ tactics against their unionized workforces which ‘resemble that of the toughest corporation’ (11).

Much of the literature from the UK focuses on conditions under which unionisation in contracted-out agencies can be successful, and reasons why it has not (Author B, 2008; Simms, 2007; Hemmings, 2011). Various authors (Author B, 2008; Simms, 2007; Hemmings, 2011) show that union success often rests on a lack of inhibiting factors (employer reprisals) as well as the existence of a core of workplace activists and union staff working together to advance a program that Simms (2007) terms ‘managed activism’ (132). Author B (2008) notes the growing importance of external factors such as product markets and competition, but also how increasingly controlling and parsimonious funders and supply-chain squeeze make it difficult to attribute blame for injustice in the workplace on immediate employers.

Research (Author A, 2004; Author B, 2008; Hemmings, 2011) confirm that the nonprofit sector is increasingly exposed to these market/institutional structures of capitalist markets which may make strike activity more likely (Authors, 2012; Swartz and Warskett, 2012). However, large pockets of non-unionism (Author B, 2008; Hemmings, 2011) exist in the nonprofit sector as well as a tendency among workers and management is ‘to get along’ (Capulong, 2006). Nevertheless, our data set includes agencies where strikes and other forms of workplace resistance had recently occurred.

### **Mobilisation Theory and Gender**

Though critiqued for omitting gender (Pocock, 1997; Wajcman, 2000), Kelly’s now-classic mobilisation theory (1998) is useful for analysing factors that contribute to union activism. He



identifies six factors that make for effective mobilisation of workers specifically: 1) the emergence of a sense of widely shared injustice in the workplace, where workers reject the status quo; 2) the capacity to attribute blame on the employer and liability for a solution; 3) a sense that collective action can make a difference; 4) the presence of a collective organisation for workers to join and provide resources for their concerns; 5) assessments that the cost of such actions (employer reprisals) will be small; and 6) the existence of a core of activists/leaders who can construct and maintain the sense of injustice, identity and cohesion in the face of counter-mobilisation strategies from management (Kelly, 2005, 1998).

Empirical studies have expanded mobilisation theory's analysis to recognize the possibility that local activist/worker efforts to mobilise may be 'dissipated' by the priorities of central union organisations (Taylor and Bain, 2002). Author B (2008) notes that funders of non-profits act as a significant 'other' (or second) employer, making the task of attributing blame to the direct employer for injustices in the workplace extremely difficult.

Pocock (1997) asserts that mobilization theory fails to address women's experience and Wacjman (2000) argues similarly that mobilisation theory needs to account for power inequalities based on gender. Historically, worker conflict and the mobilisation of discontent in public services has had strong gendered dimensions reflecting the struggles of women attempting to ameliorate low pay and conditions against state rationalization policies (Newman, 2013; Coffey and Thornley, 2014; Briskin, 2010). Public expenditure cuts, which have been exacerbated by austerity measures, have been seen to be particularly detrimental to women workers (Rubery and Rafferty, 2011; Tsarouhas, 2011) and may give rise to a new era of feminized resistance, particularly in the larger public sector, including nonprofit services. As Newman (2013) notes, new forms of managerialism, NPM, retrenchment and competition in

public funded services have harmed women but simultaneously opened up new spaces for women to lead resistance against marketization.

As noted earlier, the non-profit care workforce is largely feminized. Ongoing waves of outsourcing to the non-profit sector represent efforts from state enterprises to access cheaper, in this case, feminized, flexible and less unionized labour. Collective mobilisation of workforces involve the expression and identification of injustices in the workplace (Kelly, Point 1, 1998), and in this sector, these injustices tend to encompass women's issues such as low pay, precarity and violence from clients (Author A + B, 2014; Charlesworth, 2010). However, the ability to mobilise any sense of injustice or to take strike action has the potential to clash with the aforementioned 'natural' passion to care (Author A, 2010; Kimmel, 2006; Charlesworth, 2010). Hence, collective action in the NPSS is always tempered by how much that action disrupts services and the care of service users (Capulong, 2006; Hemmings, 2011). Moreover, in predominantly female occupational groups constraints often emerge in their capacity to become activists and leaders (Kelly, Point 5, 1998) due to tensions between women's caring responsibilities outside the workplace, labour market participation and union involvement (Tsarouhas, 2011). This article now turns to an examination of the findings in relations to: mobilisation theory's use in this gendered context; whether the conditions still exist for a progressive culture of management-union relations; and whether government funding cuts are leading to a possible convergence between private and nonprofit approaches to union-management relations.

## **The study and methods**

Our study undertook comparative, international, intensive case studies or rapid ethnographies (Handwerker, 2001; Szehebely, 2007) of NPSS agencies in four liberal welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 2013), namely Canada, Australia, the UK and New Zealand. Liberal welfare states are found principally among the affluent, Anglo countries, all of whom have been involved in significant retrenchment since the 1980s, with particular gendered impacts (Clarke and Newman, 2013; Cohen, 2013).

For this article, data is drawn exclusively from intensive case studies undertaken in Canada and Scotland (UK) where union struggles in the nonprofit agencies studied were highly conflictual just prior to and after our case studies. As mentioned earlier, these same conditions were not evident in the case studies in the other two countries and hence, the focus of this article is Canada and Scotland.

Austerity measures have been introduced in each of the countries studied, with the UK introducing the most aggressive measures and Canada introducing escalating constraint initiatives despite not having experienced a recession or significant deficits. Social programs and services have been cut significantly in each country and further cutbacks are forecast. Union density in the NPSS is roughly the same in each country studied and strike frequency has been very low for years.

A multi-method, qualitative case study method (Glesne, 2014) was used in which the agencies studied were selected on the basis of similarity and difference (Patton, 2014). Each agency was: large-sized (more than 100 employees); multi-service; multi-site; and provided a range of NPSS including adult and children's services, housing, addictions services, food security and counselling. All agencies received the majority of their funding through government contracts and raised minimal funds privately. Management and higher end job categories tended

to have university education while lower job categories such as home care worker or disability support worker tended to have training of a few weeks or months duration. In both cases, the unions represented workers in the public and nonprofit sectors and represented all workers in the agencies except management.

Both agencies studied had long term union agreements and a reputation for progressive management and industrial relations. The reason we studied the data from these two case studies closely is that we were interested in the shift from long term labour peace to conflict in management-worker relations. The data analysed in this article includes a total of 34 interviews (16 in Canada and 18 in Scotland), 7 participant observations (4 in Canada and 3 in Scotland) and an overview of publically available documents and websites. Interviews took place with a variety of players in and around the workplace including: 2 executive directors (1 in each site); 3 union representatives (1 in Scotland and 2 in Canada); 9 managers (5 in Scotland and 4 in Canada); and 20 front-line workers (11 in Scotland and 9 in Canada). Criterion sampling was used to recruit managers, frontline supervisors, and frontline staff initially through passive sampling (notices circulated through email and posted in the agencies). Because passive sampling is not always successful in agencies when staff are very busy or work mostly outside the office and rarely read notices or email, we will also used snowball sampling (asking participants to suggest individuals with interesting things to say on this topic and triangulating suggestions to locate potential participants) in order to build a varied (age, experience, race, gender, training) and credible sample (Glesne, 2014). Reflecting the gender break down in the sector, the majority of research participants were female (80%) though this is across the entire sample. Among management males predominated in the sample and the field.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were audio recorded and transcribed *verbatim*. Participants were asked to comment on changes they had experienced in the last few years, reasons for working and staying in the NPSS, changes they would like to see, advice they would give to others and their experience of working in this environment. Participant observations were naturalistic and involved a mixture of interaction and informal discussions with agency workers, service users and others present at the project (DeWalt, 2007). Field notes were written up at the end of every observation and pooled with interview data for analysis.

Data analysis took place through a constant comparison method until themes were identified and patterns discerned (Glesne, 2013; Kirby et al., 2005). As is typical of this type of qualitative, exploratory study, unexpected data emerged in the process of data collection and were folded into subsequent interview questions and observations. Recent strikes and union activism emerged as strong, early themes in the two study sites and were pursued in subsequent data collection. Ethics approval was received in each jurisdiction from the universities involved.

## **Findings**

This section discusses the three strongest themes that emerged in data analysis (described above) of the two case studies in which the two strikes occurred: 1) expression and identification of injustices in the workplace; 2) the increase in activism; 3) the attribution of injustices to the employer and the reassertion of management control; and 4) the role of external forces and parties. Although these themes overlap significantly, they are separated here for analytic purposes. Due to space constraints, we draw on exemplar quotes to highlight the voices of those working in the study sites, though more data exists to substantiate this analysis.

### *The expression and identification of injustices in the workplace*

Kelly (1998) argues that mobilisation requires (Point 1) the emergence of a sense of widely shared injustice in the workplace, where workers rejected the status quo, which could be clearly seen in the workplaces studied. The immediate issues behind strong strike votes and subsequent strike action in the two agencies were similar and included: a 1-3% wage increase for the first time in five years and benefits for precarious workers (Canada); and a 1% wage increase and opposition to efforts to reduce absence pay entitlement (Scotland). Wage levels are largely frozen in the nonprofit sector in the two countries studied so these increases represent a victory and are slightly under par compared to public sector increases (Statistics Canada, 2016; Office of National Statistics 2016 ). Similar data on wage increases are not available for management. These strikes had strong gendered dimensions as the majority of the workers were female and expressed a high commitment to care, itself a gender-saturated concept. In particular, precarious workers (part-timers) in the Canadian case were overwhelmingly women as were the direct care workers in both case studies, such as home care workers for elderly people and people with disabilities. In the Scottish case, although the union campaigned for better pay for the whole workforce, there were particular pockets of concern. In particular, a group of ‘classroom assistants’ that were 95 percent female, and predominantly female groups of workers that were charged with providing services to youths that were part of the gang culture of urban areas in Scotland. Both groups of workers were in receipt of pay just above or at the rate of the UK minimum wage (much lower than the agency average), had precarity in their working lives and were vulnerable to verbal and physical violence from service users (Authors 2013). In both

workplaces, workers believed that management could and should take responsibility for fixing these issues, reflecting a strong example of Kelly's (1998) points that: 2) the workers had and used their capacity to attribute blame on the employer and liability for a solution; and acted on these sensibilities to reinforce their convictions that; 3) a sense that collective action could make a difference. The existence of an active union in both workplaces meant that workers had Kelly's Point 4 (1998), namely the presence of a collective organization for workers to join and provide resources for their concerns.

### ***The increase in activism and participation among the workforce***

Consistent with Kelly's (2005; 1998) mobilisation analysis, the workers in the agencies studied had a strong sense that collective action could make a difference and improve conditions. However they expected management to be part of this collective action rather than opposed to it. In the Canadian case, for example, workers asserted their concerns in the context of decades of informality and management cooperation. In doing so, they (mistakenly) believed that management would return to the participatory process agreed to early in negotiations, and eventually agree to their bargaining demands because they promoted greater fairness and equality. Based on this assessment, the workers calculated that the costs for re-asserting their original bargaining process and demands would be negligible (Kelly, 1998, Point 5). However, management did not return to the agreed upon and traditional processes; instead workers ended up on a six day strike. Some workers wondered whether the strike was the beginning of what might be a protracted and heightened union struggle in a sector increasingly under duress,

A lot of agencies in this sector have shifted. They're a reflection of the financial climate, it is a non-profit agency but it's still affected by what's happening in the sector...it's also

the political climate and right now labour is immobilised. If they see the union as strong, they would change their position at the bargaining table. (Canada, male)

Similarly, as a mid-level coordinator (Canada) noted, in reference to her staff, ‘most of them were incredibly supportive of the union. There was definitely no breaking of ranks there.’ (Canada, female) Staff also told us they derived unintended benefits from the strike such as getting to know people from other parts of the agency and how other service areas in the same agency functioned. They developed a shared analysis of larger forces shaping their work, ‘One of the best parts of walking the line was you could actually have the conversations about structural issues in a way that we can’t do during work.’ (Canada, female). Workers viewed being on strike as a way of taking care of service users by protecting the services they needed, and defending workers less able to speak for themselves such as the growing number of precarious workers in the agency. As one worker put it, ‘We have to be their voice because they quite frankly don’t have one’. (Canada, female) This care theme reflects the feminized notion of sacrifice for others and endless, often unpaid activist work to secure their wellbeing.

In Scotland, all the workers interviewed took part in the strike, even low paid teaching assistants. Expressions of concern over service users were common, but this did not manifest itself into rejecting strike action. Rather, there was recognition that the harsh financial environment was deleterious to the well-being of all concerned. One young woman noted that while she ‘worried about the impact (the service users) and didn’t want to go out, my loyalty is with my co-workers. They needed me (on the picket line)’. (Scotland, female) This expression of concern for both service users and co-workers appears to underscore the ways that the gendered solidarity in this sector pivots on care and willingness to sacrifice for others (see also Briskin, 2010). There was also evidence of emerging activism as at the end of the dispute, the senior



steward moved onto a full-time union role, but was immediately replaced by a young mid-twenties female worker who reported how she had been energized by the campaign and feeling of solidarity on the picket lines.

### ***The attribution of injustices to the employer***

Kelly's (1998) mobilisation theory provides explanations for this apparent radicalization of the workforces within the two cases, specifically concerning the attribution of injustice to the employer (Point 2) and the presence of a collective organization for the workers to join and provide resources for their concerns (Point 4). Activists and employees reported that a factor that mobilised their participation in industrial action was that it was 'clear that management was to blame' for various injustices in the workplace (Scotland, female). Many employees pointed to unjust practices.

Union activists in the Canadian case reported that management could and should have done more to advocate for better funding for the agency and the sector. The participatory ethos of the sector encourages management to be activist and advocate on behalf of *and with* the agency, workers and service users. Management had retreated from this role by reducing and removing participatory formats such as staff meetings, educationals and forums, and changing mutually agreed to participatory collective bargaining processes mid-stream. Management was seen to immerse itself instead in less politically assertive, more formalized, administrative roles as overseers of compliance with government contracts. This shift in priority increased direct management control over the workforce through NPM outcome and competitive performance

metrics and provided workers with a sense that management had betrayed them and the service users.

Notwithstanding the context imposed by government funding constraint, in Canada, participants noted a cultural shift towards more corporate and conflictual models as nonprofit agencies filled their Boards of Directors with members of the business community, displacing members of the local community and dismissing traditional processes of staff and community consultation and involvement. As one mid-level manager noted,

At some point management at our agency decided that they needed more people who are in business, more people who are powerful so they could pull in funding, and they got more of those board members in. Once they had them they realised that they came with a completely different world view and a completely different attitude and a completely different focus. Ever since then they've been trying to explain to them what the agency philosophy is. (Canada, female)

Another manager agreed, with some mirth that 'The board now is considerably, I think, more conservative than management is'. (Canada, male) In addition, activists told us that there was little evidence that private funding raising had improved with the more business-oriented Boards. The vast majority of funding continued to come from government contracts.

In the Scottish case several interviewees felt that the board had purposely recruited a new CEO with a strong business ethos/background. This was despite the fact that the board already contained members with a mix of business and non-business backgrounds. This created some conflict between the Board and the CEO, according to one worker, 'business strategies dominated and we got the bad end of it' (Scotland, female).

More pro-market business-like attitudes from the new CEO in Scotland became apparent when interviewed by local media during the strike. In response to a question as to whether he and his senior management team should receive the same small raises or wage cuts offered to the workers rather than the generous awards management had received, he stated that the latter

accurately reflected market forces and anything less would ‘serve no useful purpose’ (CEO, male, Scotland).

Another factor influencing attribution of blame to management related to the reassertion of prerogative and control during the period of labour unrest. Despite their putatively more progressive outlook, the senior managers involved in our study appeared to adopt an approach to unions and union mobilisation that involved a reassertion of ‘management rights’ (Canada, female) or the notion that management alone runs the workplace and that this is not a participatory process. Though the feminized ethos of the NPSS emphasizes equity and participation including a staff voice at multiple levels of agency policy and service delivery, interviews with front-line staff revealed a sense that management had changed its approach to participation and collaboration, particularly during bargaining. As a senior worker and co-president of the union observed, ‘there seemed to be less willingness to share any power’ (Canada, female). This same worker underscored the cultural shift away from shared processes and participation:

We (management and the union) had agreed on a process at the beginning of how things would work, and then (the management lawyer) came in and said, “These are the things we refuse to talk about any more and these are the things that we’ll still talk about. We don’t agree with any of them but we’ll still talk about them.” Which was not the process! So, the union continued to say, “Well, we’re just dealing with everything in the way that we agreed to at the beginning.”

Paternalism overlapped with this reassertion of managerial dominance, expressed, in particular, in relation to unions, job actions and strikes. For example, in the Canadian case study, senior management continuously told us that the staff did not understand that voting affirmatively on a strike vote meant that they may end up on strike. Highlighting this presumed naïveté, a manager on the bargaining team, told us that her staff voted yes on the strike ballot, ‘Not realising when you voted, you gave permission for that bargaining team to make those decisions on your behalf’

(Canada, female). Similarly in Scotland, management displayed classic unitarist attitudes (Fox 1996), blaming ‘trouble-makers’ in the union for stirring up anxiety among the workforce and misrepresenting management’s message (Scotland, male). This was in contrast to responses from workers who stated that rather than being manipulated into a position they did not back, support for the strike was strong among staff across the agency.

An additional side effect of the strikes seemed to be the sense that management and workers were not always playing on the same side, or a break in the unitarist narrative. Many workers expressed surprise that management was willing to escalate the dispute to the point where workers felt compelled to go out on strike, ‘People were angry, they were upset, the comments that we heard was, “How could management let this happen?”’ (Canada, female) This disbelief continued after the end of the six day strike. As one front-line worker told us, ‘We (the agency) had a staff party after the strike to celebrate the agency’s anniversary; lots of people didn’t come because they were offended.’ (Canada, female) This on-going sense of unfairness and injustice among workers was highlighted by how respondents ‘didn’t want to deal with management’ (Canada, female) and rejected organisational efforts to re-engage with the workforce. Similarly, though they voted strongly in favour of strike action, workers in the Scottish case reported ‘a sense of disbelief’ that they ‘were actually embarking on industrial action’, and placed the blame on ‘unreasonable’ management responses to financial difficulties (Scotland, male).

### ***Role of External Forces and Parties***

A further explanation of the above outcomes, involved the role that external forces and parties were perceived to have played in placing increasing pressure on cooperative management-union culture. The shift from a more participatory management-union relations model to a more antagonistic one seemed to be composed of a political shift reflecting the global politics of constraint and what some have called the ‘politics of envy’ (Swartz and Warksett, 2012). Here, wages and conditions of public service workers are begrudged as in popular discourse they have become targets for roll back by governments as part of agendas aimed at deficit reduction following close on the heels of state bail-outs and stimulus packages to address the 2008 global financial crisis (Peck, 2012). A political shift accompanying cost control and more recently, deficit reduction agendas involves claims that the wages, conditions and pensions of the public sector are unfair and no longer affordable. As a consequence, public sector wages and conditions are under attack by every level of government and the private sector, and vilified in larger social discourse (Swartz and Warskett, 2012). Though wages and conditions in the nonprofit sector have always been behind those of the public sector, the themes of austere expectations and cutbacks frame the agenda for nonprofit management-union relations. Canadian union members appeared acutely aware of this larger shift, as noted by one senior worker and co-president of the union local,

I think it’s hard in this climate because unions have such a bad reputation right now. Public service unions are despised more than anybody else. There was some study done and it’s people who are in public sector unions are the bottom of the totem pole in terms of public perception. (Canada, female)

A front-line community organizer noted that this antagonism was also evident among communities of service users, ‘Quite frankly, a lot of the low income communities are really pissed off at unions, unfairly so in my opinion, but they are’ (Canada, female). In Scotland, union

organisers noted the challenges of organising in the context of austerity, arguing that ‘you’re swimming up against the biggest downstream since the 1930s’. (Scotland, female). At the same time, in a somewhat different vein and perhaps reflecting the political climate in the devolved Scottish administration, union activists argued that ‘there’s nothing coming through to us as a philosophical objection to trade unionism’ (Scotland, female). The same activist continued,

a lot of these organisations...would want to be paying their workers a higher rate. But because of the squeeze that has been put on them by public sector bodies...we appreciate that a lot of these organisations are being dragged to the bottom. (Scotland, female)

Arguably, nonprofit management was responding to the above noted ideological and financial shifts characteristic of austerity and the subsequent supply-chain squeeze in the form of funding freezes and increased service demand. Management repeatedly told us that they felt they had few options available other than to insist on union concessions and to impose wage roll-backs or freezes instead of job losses.

The other factor exacerbating the conflicts was the role of actors external to the agency, union and management. Management and workers in each of the case studies reported an intensification of campaigning from regional union officials as a consequence of national policies on pay and conditions in the respective non-profit sectors. The HR Director in the Scottish case claimed workplace unionists were influenced by broader regional labour movement campaigns highlighting pressures on terms and conditions in the sector, and defending workers’ pay. The union representative at the agency we studied claimed that management accused the union of being manipulated by the labour movement because of this larger campaign and insisted on ‘management’s right to exercise prerogatives to change terms and conditions’ to ensure the long-term survival of the organisation (Scotland, female). The HR Director further felt that the organisation was ‘made an example of’ as part of a wider effort by regional union officials to

campaign against cuts in the sector and, patronizingly noted that workers ‘didn’t really know what they were doing’ (Scotland, male).

In the Canadian study, management blamed the national union representative. Repeating a sentiment present in all management interviews, one of the senior managers (Canada) identified the source of conflicted workplace relations as the national union, ‘I think it was (the) national union. I think it was their tactics more than the staff, and I think that they wanted to make an example of us. I really do think they wanted to make an example of (the agency).’ (Canada, female).

In contrast, most staff blamed the lawyer management hired from a notoriously anti-public sector law firm. In addition, many staff seemed to view the conflict as a process that was taken outside of local control, ‘the union rep and the lawyer on the side of the management bargaining committee did not see eye to eye and they hijacked the proceeding’ (Canada, female). Union activists in each case viewed the external personalities and conflicts as extensions of strained relations in the workplace. As one long term union activist noted,

These people are actors; they’re antagonists in the drama. But the political decisions on the union’s side and on the management side are made by the leadership. If either of those sides is not providing good leadership, then that’s a problem. (Canada, male)

For management, blaming external forces seemed to permit them to rebuild a sense of unitarism (Fox 1996), or the sense of shared interests across the organisation, disrupted not by their actions but by the presence and instigation of an outsider or ‘bad apple’ (Scotland, male). For workers, blaming external forces let them return to work, albeit more experienced in union struggles and more aware of the strength of the forces against them.

### ***Some caveats to the radicalisation of nonprofit sector workforce***

Some employee attitudes revealed that caution is prudent before assuming a significant radicalisation of the entire non-profit workforce. Most workers hoped that a return to more progressive, participatory IR culture might be possible in the future. Many workers seemed able to hold on to a dualist mind-set in which they accorded no particular ‘malice’ (Canada, female) to management, instead viewing the strike as an isolated event in which management had deviated from its normal, progressive, participatory path. A senior community development worker noted that management had made ‘wrong decisions’ which precipitated the strike but added,

I don’t think there’s an agenda to smash the union or weaken the union. I think historically they’ve always felt that the union was very useful cos it’s a way to try and ensure that we have fairness and consistency and that we have different ways to manage breakdowns that happen between workers and management. Many of the senior management were active in unions either here or at other places of work before they came here. They’re generally pro-labour. (Canada, female)

Other workers agreed with this assessment and viewed the strike as an isolated event. The generosity of these staff in excusing the new IR culture as not truly reflecting management’s intentions, represented wishful thinking as far as we could tell as we saw no evidence that management was pro-labour or wanted to soften their tougher IR positioning.

In Scotland, serious concerns were raised among front-line activists in a branch meeting following the dispute. Though relations between unions and management had settled down following the dispute, there was ‘an air of distrust’ and activists reported trepidation regarding future management efforts to ‘reduce terms and conditions’ (Scotland, female). This stemmed from fears that as austerity worsened, management may propose further changes and that the chances of industrial action making a significant difference would be diminished as public service cuts intensified.



The union in Scotland was prescient in expressing deep concern early on over what looked (and looks) like a bleak future in terms of union-management cooperation and worker gains across the industrial countries. Though sickness absences were temporarily saved in the Scottish case, a three day waiting period was instituted the following year (before absence pay could be claimed) along with a 20% pay cut for some workers, and redundancies (lay-offs) took place the year after.

Management in both countries was adamant that they did their best during and after the strikes, and that the union was an obstruction to the maintenance of staff and service levels. The discussion above strongly suggests a shift in management-union culture to a more formalized, antagonistic one, framed by austere and inadequate government funding.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

This article began by asking about whether conditions still exist for a progressive culture of management-union relations and what that means for this sector. We also explored the connections between mobilization and feminist political economy theory and asked whether a convergence is occurring between private and nonprofit approaches to union-management relations.

A progressive model may have been more prevalent at one time in some parts of the NPSS. However, the shift to a more private market, high-conflict model has been accelerated by NPM models that failed to see cost savings from collective, participatory processes and hence, reduced or removed them (Courtney and Hickey 2016; McDonald, 2006). Overall, growing exposure to market relations means that nonprofits are increasingly integrated into the fabric and

structure of capitalism (Author B, 2010). Within the global context of austerity, there is little reason to assume that a particular sector or group of managers and workers can consistently chart an independent and progressive course (Aronson and Smith, 2011). Our findings suggest that it is not only market forces but also a larger cultural shift towards extended public sector austerity that sets the ideological frame for a high-conflict industrial relations culture in the NPSS (Swartz and Warskett, 2012). Overall, the data confirms a shift in the operation of industrial relations at the two agencies studied and suggests that progressive management-union relations in the NPSS and labour peace are unlikely, no matter how much some workers hope it will return to the more informal and progressive model of earlier times.

Ironically, rather than pacify the female-majority workforce, these changes appeared to have contributed to the mobilisation of union members in resisting the new and more antagonistic management regime. Our data suggested that much of this resistance took the form of gendered, shared oppositional identities that intertwined caring about service users and social justice with workplace and larger social resistance. These resistance strategies and the mobilisation revealed new insights into the ‘doing’ of gender in everyday ways in contemporary care workplaces; contributing new aspects to the feminist political economy analysis of nonprofit care work. Additionally, this doing of gender forms an important aspect of the contemporary political economy in which institutions of the political economy, such as government, are increasingly setting market terms for areas of work, such as in the NPSS, where market values were previously unheard of. Ironically, in the process of inserting market terms into the NPSS, governments are simultaneously setting the conditions under which workers resist market agendas and social uncaring.

In terms of mobilisation theory, we have contributed to Wacjman's (2000) call for mobilisation theory to account for power inequalities based on gender. Our data and analysis extended and gender mobilisation theory by identifying a gendered dynamic underlying mobilisation in our case studies. The data show that many of the female-majority workers seemed to be motivated to participate in union actions by a strong and gendered sense of care for service users and co-workers, coupled with willingness to sacrifice on their behalf, even where the issues did not directly affect them (such as full-time workers striking for precarious workers). These findings suggest that the concept of union and social solidarity/mobilisation in the context of care work has a gendered character in which the willingness to struggle alongside others in the workplace may pivot on gendered notions of care as elastic, inclusive and not exclusively tethered to economic concerns (Author A, 2015a; Briskin, 2010).

Throughout the findings section, we have noted which aspects of Kelly's mobilisation theory came into play and gendered aspects to it where they were apparent. Most of these aspects reflect the dynamic identified above. For example, the analysis shows that the workers in the agencies studied had a strong sense that collective action could make a difference and improve conditions (Kelly, 2005; 1998, Point 1) for both the workers and the services users, but they clearly expected management to be part of this collective action rather than using IR processes to oppose it. In other words, they assumed that management shared the commitment to care despite conditions, poor pay, heavy workloads and government policy that systemically underfunded important services. Though recognizing that it was government rather than management who were responsible for funding cuts, workers attributed injustice to their employers when the employers failed to protect the workers in any concrete way, failed to advocate with government for more funding and choose to recruit pro-business Board members (Kelly, 1998, Point 2).

These shared analyses on the part of the care workers and their willingness to take strike action are examples of Kelly's (1998) Point 3, a sense that collective action can make a difference, in this case a gendered strategy of care and solidarity.

Further, the unions in each workplace provided a vehicle that workers could and did join to voice their concerns and draw on resources to build their strategies (Kelly, 1998, Point 4). Our data also showed that workers mistakenly thought that management would side with them in a shared agenda of struggle against austerity policies and underfunding. This meant that they felt that their strike actions would have minimal costs in the form of employer reprisals (Kelly, 1998, Point 5). Unfortunately, we did not have sufficient data to analyse Kelly's 6<sup>th</sup> point (the existence of a core of activists/leaders who construct and maintain the sense of injustice, identity and cohesion in the face of counter-mobilisation from management), for though we had many quotes from union representatives and leaders, their discussion did not focus on counter-mobilisation from management in sufficient depth to advance credible conclusions.

As noted earlier in this article, some authors have argued that NPM has not been monolithic and that restructured welfare states continue to reflect local strengths and structural differences (Bach and Bordogna, 2011; Hood and Peter, 2004). However, this study suggests convergences, including gendered convergences, at several levels. Firstly, despite differences in the severity of recession in the two countries and depth of austerity cutbacks, as noted above, a convergence of private and nonprofit *industrial relations* approaches is apparent in these cases in this type of welfare state. Industrial relations in the two agencies moved away from a more informal, participatory, cooperative approach to a more formalized, conflictual approach. This new IR approach passes itself off as gender-neutral and just good business, rather than as a set of exploitive gendered relations that depend on the goodwill and unpaid labour of the majority

female staff. As noted above, care work and resistance strategies remain saturated with gendered expectations that predominantly female workers have of themselves, each other, and that management has of them (Themudo 2009). This willingness to self-exploit in the name of care and fairness is both a strength and liability for the workers in this sector as management (and government) benefits from unpaid work while workers use unpaid work and activism to sustain a sense of integrity and shared, oppositional identities as socially-engaged people who defend their own rights and those of others. These oppositional, caring identities and shared agendas sometimes resulted in the strike action analysed in this article and other forms of fight back efforts. As such, these oppositional and socially-engaged identities are counter-hegemonic to the notion of the competitive, entrepreneurial, self-advancing individual valorized in neoliberal discourse and are a pivotal aspect of gendered resistance to austerity (Author A, 2015a; Cohen, 2013; Clarke and Newman, 2013). Though smaller, local differences remain and workers are facing increasingly difficult conditions, these resistance strategies reveal a convergence across the liberal welfare states studied.

Secondly, at the level of *policy impacts* where workers in similar nonprofit agencies in different countries contended with similar shifts in the industrial relations culture, a convergence can be seen in the constraint of cutbacks, the integration of austerity policies and the continued restrictions of NPM. These constraints have a strongly gendered character as agencies depend on and exploit the aforementioned, taken-for-granted tendency of the female majority workforce to accept and accommodate work intensification and to work unpaid hours (Author A, 2015a; Charlesworth, 2010). In many ways, this convergence predates austerity policies, but its importance has grown under long term conditions of escalating cutbacks in the NPSS (Pierson, 2002). Interestingly, this ethos of care formed the basis for resistance strategies based on values

and themes that also predate austerity policies and once formed the foundation for the social welfare state, namely equity, fairness and social solidarity (Clarke and Newman, 2012).

Further research across a larger number of studies and countries is necessary to confirm these beginning theorizations. These case studies confirm gender influencing social processes of mobilisation (Kelly's Points 1 to 3, and less so 4 and 5). Further research should be undertaken to highlight where these and other aspects of Kelly's mobilisation factors may be active. Particular attention should be paid to examples, if they exist, where acrimonious management-union relations have shifted to more participatory and peaceful ones, or where peaceful, progressive industrial relations have been maintained. These examples may signal the way to build the inclusive, participatory, equitable relations that have been the aspirational goal of this highly gendered and increasingly marketised sector.

## **Endnotes**

1. In 2002 Paul Pierson argued that the governments of affluent countries had been pursuing policies of 'permanent austerity' for some time and would likely intensify this approach. His words were confirmed after the 2008 financial crisis when even countries who had not experienced recession introduced policies cutting public services and restructuring labour markets. The terms austerity is used here to denote this policy direction and the neoliberal ideology accompanying it, rather than a specific moment in time. See Cohen (2013) for a discussion of gendered austerity.
2. Activist is defined as a person who is undertakes a variety of activities in pursuit of change.

3. ‘Service user’ is the preferred term in social service work, replacing ‘client’ which was seen as pejorative or “customer” due to its obvious commercial links.
4. Bracketed comment in the original.

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