

Seeing gender and ethnicity at work

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ABSTRACT

In this case study of a small metals manufacturing workplace, we draw links between gender identity and how it is enacted. We examine gender in terms of three inter-related layers. Firstly, we examine expressions of masculinity as 'class' by comparing management and working class stories. Secondly, the reproduction of gender identities through work processes is considered. We found that working class masculine and feminine identities were sustained through ceremonies and rituals embedded in work processes despite ostensible similarities between men and women in terms of work performed, classification and remuneration. Thirdly we examine the impact of age and ethnicity clusters on gender identity. Amongst the blue-collar workers, age clusters included married with children, mature women and young, unmarried males. Three different ethnic clusters were evident, Filipina, Anglo and second-generation migrants. Teasing apart these differences reveals systemic discriminations that are embedded in an Anglo hierarchy that can be described as both hegemonic and symbolically constructed.

Introduction

This paper explores constructions of gender identity in interview material collected for a case study on 'MM Supplies (Australia) Pty Ltd'; a factory located in the Illawarra region (south of Sydney). We were originally interested in this site because it appeared to have a number of atypical gender dynamics on the factory floor including: blue collar male and female workers doing the same work (a very unusual practice in metals manufacturing) and prime aged married women working alongside younger unmarried men. This presented a rare opportunity to investigate the mechanics behind the creation of workplace hierarchies beyond the more readily apparent distinctions in the manufacturing labour market around 'men or women', and 'English or other-than-English language background'. A closer examination revealed quite subtle processes of gender, class and ethnicity embedded in work processes. In the case study, blue collar males expressed a version of working class masculinity that featured physical strength as opposed to mental quick thinking featuring in a managerial type of masculinity. They differentiated themselves from their female peers in terms of work tasks, physical strength, autonomy and mobility and control of technology. At MM Supplies, male and female blue-collar workers' stories revealed they were able sustain their gender identity through 'remedial work' that involved women asking for 'help' from the men. Explanations of this process prioritised men's work over the women's work. Further, these stories revealed racial discrimination and systemic non-recognition of work that when combined with gendered work practises appeared to normalise discriminatory processes such as task allocation in the factory. The findings suggest that a full understanding of hegemonic processes requires an examination of gender, class and ethnicity in combination. We suggest that the Anglo ideological constructs evident in the case study contribute to how work is done in organisations such as MM Supplies.

The material for this case study consisted of unstructured interviews with the general manager, the production supervisor and blue-collar employees (eight interviews in total), observations from around one dozen visits (December 2000 to March 2001) and informal conversations recorded in a diary. Protection of identity and confidentiality was an important concern for interviewees; hence this paper uses pseudonyms and suppresses sources of quotes. Transcripts of the interviews were initially examined for individual representations of 'self' and 'other' to identify patterns or clusters of difference articulated by the respondents. We then examined a range of literature on gender identity, sexual identity, ethnicity and age for theoretical concepts that might explain relationships between the categories that were articulated and what we saw happening in the workplace. The intensive analysis of how this small but diverse work group managed identity and relationship allowed us to see the subtleties of the active reproduction and reconstruction of workplace hierarchy.

The symbolic interpretive approach to the analysis in this paper draws heavily on three different sets of literature. Firstly, we draw on theories of 'hegemony' to examine the relationship between the multiple masculinities and femininities within the workplace (Connell 1995; Demetriou 2001). Secondly we were influenced by the work of Lupton (2000) and Gherardi (1995) who explain how men and women 'do' gender differently in workplaces. The third set of literature draws on studies of ethnicity in Australia (including Vasta 1991, 1993; Bottomley 1991) and in Metals Manufacturing (Williams 1992; Webber et al. 1992). This body of work alerted us to problems of an Anglo focus of interpretations of gender.

For a number of years, feminist industrial relations researchers including Pocock (1995, 1997) and Hansen (2002) have claimed that the issue of men must become part of the gender debate if we are to understand how unequal relationships are constructed, re-negotiated and maintained on capitalist and patriarchal values. These authors claim that traditional analysis equates gender with women in a way that leads to assumption of women's deficiency, along with the assumption that theories about identity, relationships, processes and structures in industrial relations are gender neutral. The concept of hegemonic relationships offers a way of thinking about gendered power relationships that places 'men as men' firmly on the agenda while also allowing a consideration of class and ethnicity.

Hegemony has been defined as a cultural practise where 'a social class achieves a predominant influence and power, not by direct and overt means, but by succeeding in making its ideological view of society so pervasive that the subordinate classes unwittingly accept and participate in their own oppression' (Abbott 2004 citing Abrams 1999:151). In this sense 'hegemony' is used to include the consensual, collusive relationship between the leading group (such as capitalists) and their followers (workers) (Sassoon 1991) and is therefore an understanding of the strategies used by the dominant social group in ideological struggles within the capitalist system. Social institutions such as the workplace function to produce such ideology and are also sites of a struggle to control ideological production (Althusser 1971).

Hegemonic masculinity is generally understood as the dominant, culturally idealised form of masculinity against which other forms of masculinity and forms of femininity are compared and found lacking. Demetriou claims that 'hegemonic masculinity is not a purely white or heterosexual configuration of practice but it is a hybrid bloc that unites practices from diverse masculinities in order to ensure the reproduction of patriarchy' (2001:1). Connell claimed that use of the concept allows researchers to explore how identity and behaviour is determined as appropriate (or not) and helps explain how unequal power relationships are constructed and maintained (see also Lupton 2000:34; Mills 1989:172).

In order to begin to tease out the strands of 'hybrid bloc' contained in our case study we drew on Lupton (2000) and Gherardi (1995:139-142) who helped us see that women and men use different strategies to maintain gender identity within the workplace. Lupton addresses the strategies that men use when employed in 'feminine occupations' to reconstruct or renegotiate their identity through actions or discourse that re-construct control and power. He claims that as a result of working in feminised occupations men experience a compromise between their gender and occupational identities. Men either:

- a. discursively reconstruct the nature of their occupation by either relabelling their positions or emphasise tasks such as planing and organising rather than feminine tasks such as typing, or
- b) they will reconstruct their jobs to avoid feminine tasks for more manly work, therefore actually doing different work to women on the job, or
- c) re-negotiate what it is to be a man (2000:33).

In this way men hope to avoid 'contagious femininity' (Burton 1991).

Gherardi (1995) explains that women's presence in the workplace is problematic for gendered identity. That women's gendered identities are constructed as 'other' and therefore deficient (Muir 1997) is generally accepted in literature that includes gender analysis. Gherardi claims that as a result women often feel like intruders or guests in the workplace and they are required to negotiate the ambiguity of being both woman and worker. She claims that the management of cross-gendered situations is based on a two-stage ritual involving the ceremonial work

of paying homage to the symbolic order of gender and the ensuing remedial work done by women in order to repair breaching the symbolic order to allow maintenance of their feminine identity in the workplace. This theory helped us identify how gender was embedded in the work processes as rituals that allowed women to negotiate their ambiguous situation. Yet, as we will see, this ceremonial and ritual work re-constructs multiple masculinities and femininities within a hegemonic symbolic order.

As discussed above the hegemonic symbolic order is reproduced in asymmetrical relationships in the workplace and these were embedded in the work practices as MM Supplies (Aust.). By examining these asymmetrical relationships Gherardi claims we can explore how 'beliefs that sustain social, and how beliefs about gender are 'pardoned', minimised, remedied and concealed' (1995:129); that is, how 'the social legitimation of beliefs that sustain the power relationships between people' results in normed interactions' (1995:131). Gherardi [citing work of Goffman (1971) and Owen (1983)] argues that remedial work by women is essential in public arenas such as the workplace. She states these rituals can be understood as work which sustains the symbolic order of gender (where male is male, and the female is second-sexed) with rituals such as 'doing, paying homage, recognising or celebrating' or negatively 'avoiding, maintaining distance, forbidding'.

According to these theories men and women 'do' gender very differently. Men eliminate gender ambiguity, maintaining their masculine identity using strategies outlined by Lupton, and women 'contain' gender ambiguity in the workplace by participating in both the ceremonial and remedial rituals described by Gherardi. In our case study, theories about hegemonic processes and 'doing gender' provided insight into relationships between men and men (multiple but asymmetrical masculinities embedded in class) and between men and women (asymmetrical relationships where women were defined as what men were not). However, we also needed to draw on concepts about ethnicity to fully explain the relationships between women and women. It is this third layer in the complex web of class, gender and ethnicity that is rarely addressed in current literature. For us 'seeing' the hierarchical order of male managers, female office staff, Filipino male blue collar workers (recently absent from the workplace), male blue collar workers, Anglo female blue collar workers and Filipina female blue collar workers was an essential element in understanding how work was done at MM Supplies (Aust.).

MM Supplies (Aust.) Pty Ltd

The workplace was part of a global conglomerate head-quartered in the United States, with around 1,000 employees in eleven countries. MM Supplies (Aust) produced specialised inputs for metals manufacturing. The Australian operation existed because freight costs associated with the bulky nature of the products meant importing the assembled product was uneconomic. The products were relatively cheap; one main line sold for AUD3.25. It was assembled at MM Supplies from a fibre sleeve (manufactured locally), a technical component (imported from Mexico) and a cardboard tube (bought from an Australian supplier).

MM Supplies (Aust) employment levels fluctuated by were generally less than 20 employees. At the time of the study, it employed eleven permanent staff (see table 1), two casuals who generally worked four days per week, plus other casuals irregularly. Relationships between management and employees were friendly, as were relationships between employees. Workers valued the friendly environment. All employees spoke English proficiently and the general manager reported that there were no communication barriers including reading and writing in English. Tagalog was also spoken in the factory.

Managerial work was undertaken by males and clerical work undertaken by females. The production supervisor was male, four of the six permanent blue-collar workers were female, and three of the five casual blue-collar workers observed at the site were female. The women production workers were prime-aged, married and had children, while the permanent male production workers were much younger, not married, and had no dependents. Table 1 summarises MM Supplies employment profile (excluding irregular casuals).

TABLE 1
*Ten largest
 Whitegoods*
 Corporations
 (as measured by
 share of total
 global volume
 sales) 2001 and
 2002*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Tenure (years)</i>	<i>Title/Role</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Approx Age</i>	<i>Place of Birth</i>	<i>Language Background</i>
John*	3	General Manager	Perm FT	late 30s	Aus	English
Anna	n.a.	Marketing Assistant	Perm FT	mid 20s	Aus	English
Diane	n.a.	Accounts Clerk	Perm FT	early 30s	Aus	English
Mark	n.a.	Technical Salesperson	Perm FT	mid 20s	Aus	English
Paul	n.a.	Accountant	Perm FT	mid 50s	Aus	English
Ben*	4	Production Supervisor	Perm FT	mid 20s	Aus	Italian
Greg*	6	Production Worker	Perm FT	mid 30s	Aus	English
Harry*	4	Shipper/Receiver & Prod'n Wrkr	Perm FT	early 20s	Aus	Greek
Mary*	11	Production Worker	Perm FT	mid 50s	Eng	English
Olivia*	6	Production Worker	Perm FT	mid 40s	Philip.	Tagalog
Angela*	8	Production Worker	Perm FT	late 30s	Philip.	Tagalog
Megan*	13	Shipper/Receiver Clerk & Prod'n	Cas PT	early 40s	Aus	English
Tony	n.a.	Production Worker	Cas PT	early 50s	n.a.	n.a.

Note: asterisk denotes employees who were interviewed.

Identifiable clusters of ethnicity were Anglo and Filipina. (See Mylett and Laneyrie 2002 for a discussion of migrant employment in manufacturing. Note, the use of the term 'cluster' may seem inappropriate for a small number of workers but it acknowledges the different segments that these workers belong to in the broader regional and manufacturing labour market, given that workplace hierarchies tend to be interconstitutive with labour market hierarchies.) These clusters consisted of the Anglo and male management team and one male blue collar worker; Anglo females employed as junior office workers and two blue collar workers; and Filipina workers consisting of full-time female blue collar workers and some casual blue collar workers. MM Supplies' cluster of Filipina workers was expected to continue because of a practise of hiring by word-of-mouth, in particular 'friends of Olivia'. There were also blue collar workers who were second generation Australians.

Production work 'downstairs' was divided into areas and work stations. The production area was crowded with raw materials and the bulky finished goods. There was no computerisation, complicated machinery nor mechanised conveyance (apart from a fork lift truck). Observed in use were hand tools, a band saw, drill presses, ovens, and vacuum forming tanks. The work on the factory floor was arduous and repetitive – because of the number of hours spent doing the same thing, or because of the 'fiddly' nature of the job (for example, gluing components), or because of the dust or fumes, or, in the case of the forming tank, because of the strength needed to maintain working over time. Most of the tasks were described by workers as uncomplicated and easy to learn but that the development of sufficient speed to earn piece rate bonuses took some time. These jobs saw specific individuals' 'priorities' divided into preferences for tasks that displayed congruence with sex-based and ethnic divides. Greg, who worked on the forming tanks most of the time, produced fibre sleeves (around 1,000 per day) that were very heavy when wet. Many processes were dusty and dirty and most of the work was undertaken with gloves, safety glasses and dust masks. The heat in summer was debilitating: Harry said 'We're supposed to wear masks but when it gets 40 degrees down there, it is hard to keep it on. And we're supposed to wear safety glasses, but the safety glasses just fog up. When it gets really hot and you've got the masks on, you just want to faint'.

Class and masculinity

While there is considerable diversity amongst the employees of MM Supplies in age, gender and ethnicity, the major category of gender difference articulated by all respondents was class in terms of whether they belonged 'upstairs' or 'downstairs'. While the general manager claimed the distinction was only 'geographical', all respondents in interviews referred to management as

'upstairs' and production workers as 'downstairs'. Harry described 'downstairs' as 'hot and dusty', a 'dirty place', 'cramped', with lots of 'probably' dangerous chemicals around, a place where people helped each other, but needed more feedback and encouragement from upstairs. He also used the term 'downstairs' when he described the workers as the 'backbone of the company', who he felt were thought of by 'upstairs' as 'lower class', 'dirty people' in a 'dirty place' and mostly 'left in the dark'. These distinction between those upstairs and those downstairs were embedded within patterns of power, including authority, control and resistance at MM Supplies (see Mylett and Laneyrie 2002). Yet, the interviewees' transcripts were more about establishing gender identity than about the different interests of managers and workers. The clerical staff were included in the 'upstairs' class privileged by an air-conditioned, clean environment and knowledge about customers and orders from which downstairs workers were excluded.

There were several versions of gender roles that individuals sought to reproduce in the interviews at MM Supplies. The version of masculinity presented 'downstairs' by the workers was different to the 'upstairs' version. 'Upstairs', quick-thinking, the ability think on one's feet, was seen as an essential part of management work. The following description of obtaining an order is an example:

We walked into another guy's office. He said, 'what have you got there?' I told him. He said, 'we're looking for something like that for my part of the plant'. He said, 'I've had your competitor in here a couple of weeks ago, and he really couldn't do anything for us'. I said, 'why didn't you give us a ring?'. 'I didn't think you could do it'. I said, 'we can do anything'. I knew my mind straightaway, 'yeah, we'll do that'. Within a week, we had a box of samples down there.... It worked brilliantly, and now we're going through accreditation. We now have to supply them 500, and then 1,000. It is about developing something for someone's specific needs. We are always doing R&D downstairs. Find little bits that we haven't seen or used for a couple years, and think 'I wonder if we can use that', get that, and squash it, or make it longer, or do something with it, and use it to come up with something different (General Manager 2000).

His construction casts him as heroic and saving the day for the company (see Brewis and Linstead 1999:71; Collinson and Hearn 1994; Sinclair 1998 for descriptions of 'managerial masculinities'). Yet none of the R&D activities that he had described were evident during workplace visits nor mentioned by other interviewees.

The form of masculinity that emerged from blue collar workers' accounts was one of the strong male worker built around physical strength (Donaldson 1991:19). All of the male workers at MM Supplies reinforced this masculine image of strength and physical efficacy with references to participation in sporting activities outside working hours. According to Cockburn (1983:213) sport is associated with masculine identity in terms of physical dominance and control over the self and other. Harry established the fact that he was a competitive weightlifter outside of work and described himself as the 'human fork-lift' that helped 'with anything that the girls want in the place'. When not engaged in lifting activities he worked on assembly tasks alongside the women but he never mentioned these tasks in his interview. Many current masculine images in the workplace are built on dominance and control, autonomy and independence (Cockburn 1999). Willis (1978) claims that working-class young men are attracted to manual labouring positions because such positions epitomise both their class and sexual identity. 'Physical labouring comes to stand for and express most importantly, a kind of masculinity and also an opposition to authority' (Willis 1978:104). Here in the workplace young men, who have been labelled problematic or stupid at school can 'achieve success in what matters to them: manual labour, or 'real work' ... for these 'lads' class identity in terms of fighting 'the authorities' is expressed in terms of sexism and male assertion, of being the men who do the work' (Pollert 1981 citing Willis 1981:96). Harry was described by the interviewer as 'very confident, very strong personality, strong opinions, heart on the sleeve... [but] sensitive to what I thought about him being expelled from school and telling me that he wasn't that smart except in using his hands'.

Gender theorists, including Connell (1995), Hearn (1985) and Collinson (1994), claim that men's sexuality is an important issue in the identity of men at work. Men play sexual games, such as flexing their muscles, in order to impress each other, not the women who are around (Hearn 1985; Pollett 1991 and Gherardi 1995).

This sexual identity is often expressed openly on production sites when men mark out their territory with swearing, jokes, posters on the wall (Gherardi 1995:53; Hearn 1985). At MM Supplies Greg marked out the forming tanks as masculine space with girly pictures and by having the radio turned up so loudly that conversation with him was almost impossible until he chose to reduce the volume. This marking of territory by an individual male was also evident in some male group behaviour. Skylarking, identified as an expression of masculine sexuality (Hearn 1985), was observed on a number of occasions. The women never participated.

According to Burton (1991:6-7), male production workers, such as those at MM Supplies, risked 'contagious effeminacy' in undertaking the same work as women. 'Fiddly sit down' light assembly tasks are often undertaken by female factory workers, and frequently associated with perceptions of female dexterity, small hands, patience and tolerance for boredom (Game and Pringle 1983; Williams 1988; Gherardi 1995). In contrast to most studies of the sex-based division of labour (Game and Pringle 1983; Burton 1991) and the long tradition that assembly work is 'women's work' (Game and Pringle 1983; Williams 1988; Cockburn 1999), in this factory it is usual for males to do work that females do but the differentiation between men's and women's work was still evident although in a more subtle form (Lupton, 2000). Working on the forming tank, which was located out the back of the factory, was one of a few obvious instances of sex-based work allocation 'downstairs'. Lifting and carrying heavy items, driving the forklift and driving the truck to make deliveries were also considered men's work. The blue collar workers described working on the forming tank as being a man's job because of the need to have strong arms and to be tall enough for the tank. These men were able to differentiate themselves from the female employees as they undertook heavy work, but they also extended their explanations to finely graded distinctions in the 'fiddly, sit down' job of pressing out components that required greater arm strength.

At MM Supplies the male blue-collar workers were able to sustain their masculinity in normed interactions that were embedded in the production process. These normed interactions were associated with work that was seen as 'helping the ladies', either with the heavy lifting tasks, or in 'helping the ladies' complete their 'fiddly work'. Safety equipment was not worn by men during the observation period when the men were involved with 'helping the ladies'. In describing one incident, Ben explained that he did not wear his safety equipment because he was just helping:

I was just down there, and Angela was saying, 'I get a bit of a headache if I have to do too many'. So I said, 'I give you a bit of a hand. I'll do a couple with you'. I just sat down to do a few of them and didn't put the mask on. And I didn't have the gloves on. She had the proper safety equipment and Paul [says] 'where's your mask? Where's your gloves?' I'm like 'I'm only giving her a hand'.

According to Mary, a member of the safety committee, there was gendered response to supervision around issues of safety:

The women in here, if you say to them, 'you wear your safety goggles' they will wear them. If you go out, and tell the boys, they are suppose to wear them on the tank, 'wear a mask', you tell them, they won't, they've never done it, so they don't want to know about it.

Megan explained she didn't wear a mask sometimes, but she explained her job was not as dangerous as the men's were:

Oh, the sand? That's not too bad, that. With what Harry was doing, yes. With what the guys use out the back. When you scrape the fibre when it is cooked, you should use it too because of the dust. With sand it is all right. It hasn't got any smells or fumes, or anything like that. Otherwise, I would [wear a mask].

Such explanations hinge on defining the work that men do as risky. Here women's work is described as 'safe and easy' work, that the working class males 'help' with.

Despite the fact that the fiddly inside tasks are also part of the men's allocated tasks, the descriptions in interviews only described the men's participating in this work if requested. It was the need to ask for help that reflects 'remedial' work described by Gherardi (1995). Harry prioritised men's work when he claimed men should not have to 'take off their gloves to help the women, every time they needed it'. Greg elaborated, claiming helping 'takes me off my jobs, and then I get caught getting behind'. The practise of the women having to 'ask' for help from the

men illustrates a power relationship that allows the men's work to be justified as more important. The male blue-collar workers are able to sustain their masculinity in ceremonial work embedded in the production process. The discourses about safety requirements and helping with the fiddly women's work demonstrated a collusion that helps to sustain the notion that men were not doing real 'work' when then they helped the women.

A number of studies focus on how gender relations in individuals' personal lives, influence how they 'do gender' in the workplace. For example, Pollert's 1981 study of blue-collar workers in a tobacco factory in Bristol describes how gender roles at home had an influence on how gender roles played out in the workplace. Pollert describes a process of 'collusion' by the women that she sees sustaining men's sense of masculinity through the reproduction of myths about wages as 'pin money', a woman's 'real' place as being in the home, and work as a 'temporary stay'. The reality was that membership in the working class more than often meant that both a husband and wife had to work to pay the bills (Pollert 1981:241). At MM Supplies beliefs about 'pin money' were evident in some of the stories from management about the women workers in this case study. For example, Ben (the supervisor) felt the women in the factory were helping out their husbands by working, when justifying why it was not as problematic for women to be demoted from permanent to casual. However, this view was not reflected in any of the women's stories. In Pollert's study, the women often worked with husbands and boyfriends, however in this case study the women are working with men who are all closer age to their children. Megan had three children aged 21, 19 and 15; one of Mary's sons was 33 and she also took care of a 16-year-old grandson, while Olivia's eldest daughter was 20 years old. Gherardi observed that working class women often describe the behaviour in young men in the workplace, with the 'condescending attitude of a mother criticising her sons for excessively masculine behaviour when testing out their still uncertain sexual identities' (1995:52). Mary described Ben the supervisor as 'pretty good. A bit immature, but he is so friendly, you can't stay angry at him for long. But he does good job, I think. Gets a bit slack at times'. Williams (1992) suggests that women who have been in the workplace for over ten years are often cast as motherly by the other workers, a point evident concerning Mary. The interviewer recorded in her diary that Mary was a bit of a 'social conduit' and she acted motherly toward the others downstairs.

Mothering and ethnicity

In terms of feminine behaviour it appears that mothering was acknowledged and rewarded at MM Supplies. Despite the fact that Olivia was clearly the most qualified, Mary was recently appointed to the OHS Committee, reflecting racial discrimination and systemic non-recognition of skills. After emigrating from the Philippines, Olivia participated in further education obtaining Australian recognition of her nursing qualification. The general manager was aware that Olivia had been a nurse in the Philippines but unaware that she was qualified to work as a nurse in Australia. Olivia did not conform to gender stereotypes. While Olivia was the 'best worker' (consistently earning the highest bonuses) she was also female and Filipina. She was seen as 'moodier' than the other women were; she was not as ready to smile in response to authority and gender relations. The interviewer believed that her non-compliance with a typical 'feminine' response (in this case mothering) had her labelled as having poor people skills, and not being seen as supervisor material in the same way that Mary was. Olivia was not prepared to accept gender inequality over pay. She had complained to the general manager about men being paid more than women with some success, but this was overtaken by the implementation of a new payment system based on piece rate bonuses. However, there was an additional payment to one male worker outside the piece rate system, explained by the general manager in terms of tasks undertaken that did not attract a piece rate bonus. Also, the young male supervisor had reached agreement that he would be first in line for a pay rise once profitability recovered. Both of these males separately stated that no one else in the company was aware of any extra payments or deals they had with management. Therefore, collusion to prioritise men's work was extended beyond the relations between workers to relations between managers and workers. By contrast, Megan's extra role as shipping clerk (a role arguably demanding more education than process work) was not rewarded even though it similarly reduced her ability to earn a piece rate bonus. Indeed, she had recently been demoted to casual status.

The general manager believed that it was in the Filipino (male) and Filipina (female) nature to work hard, that they were the best workers at the factory. He was referring to the Filipina workers when he claimed, 'Certain nationalities down there earn a lot more than certain other nationalities because it is part of their nature. They come to work to work, and head down the whole day, and on pay day they are rewarded for it'. Vasta (1991:165) claims that this type of comment was commonly espoused by employers. Such comments embody the prejudicial attitudes that clearly reflect 'racially constructed class relations' (Vasta 1991:165). We would claim that these racially constructed class relations are also gendered. When the general manager was questioned specifically about 'best workers', he offered an example of a casual part time Filipino worker who had recently left for a higher paying position: 'his wife was at uni full-time. She was only on a scholarship to pay for accommodation and her uni fees, not food. So if he didn't work, he didn't eat. He couldn't get the dole. I felt really bad about it ... He's got five kids to feed, plus his wife'. This example from the past reinforced the myth of the male breadwinner and downplayed the contribution of the still-employed Filipinas.

While discrimination emerged in the interviews with the General Manager it also appeared in interviews with Anglo female blue collar workers. It appeared that multiple femininities were constructed via ethnicity in the women's interviews. At MM Supplies all direct reference and indirect reference by interviewees to ethnic difference centred on the Filipina workers. Mary when asked about working on the forming tanks exclaimed, 'Can you imagine the little Filipinos? There is no way! They would have to stand on three boxes. It is heavy on your arms, too. I wouldn't like to do it'. Here the Filipinas were distinguished by their small size, despite the fact that all the Anglo women were also very short and so was at least one of the part-time males.

The stereotypes articulated in the interviews by the manager and the Anglo female production workers were masked by Anglo patriarchal assumptions about the feminine. Gunew (cited in Vasta 1993:11) claims that much of the discussion of the roles housewife and wife are dominated by a sense that the women are the victims of patriarchal husbands. Vasta (1991:165) noted that a key problem of migrants was not patriarchal relations with her husband (whether it existed or not) but the 'isolation and loneliness caused by the migration experience, in addition to Anglo/Australian structural racism and Anglo/Australian structural patriarchy'. Multiple identities for migrant mothers include the roles of worker, wife, mother and these are influenced by their ethnicity (see for examples of Italian migrants Vasta 1991 and 1993; and Greek migrants, Bottomley 1991). These include: a focus of concern with family as a source of strength, rather than patriarchal relations with their husbands; a sense of freedom in Australia that flows from and to their work, and strong community ties that often emerge from a resistance to experienced racism (Williams 1992; Vasta 1993; Bottomley 1991). Many ethnic women have been treated with little dignity in the work place (Vasta 1993; Bottomley 1991), yet at home many make major decisions. Angela had chosen (along with her Filipino husband) not to have more than one child in response to being a worker in Australia. She felt that as a worker, one child was enough, it was too hard to have more.

Conclusion

This paper studies an unusual case, a factory where men and women perform the same work tasks. The relatively undifferentiated nature of the work - to the extent that all workers had the same job title and classification - seemed to offer little scope for constructing gender identity. However, closer study revealed that the differentiation between men and women common in manufacturing workplaces was present but in very subtle forms. Men's work was prioritised by workers and management. This analysis was deepened by studying the connections between gender, class, ethnicity and age, revealing the complexity of hegemony in a capitalist patriarchy. This research is a partial redress to literature that focuses on women rather than on the processes that reproduce gender inequities. It points to the necessity of questioning the sufficiency of traditional Anglo notions about links between patriarchy in families with patriarchy in workplaces when attempting to understand multicultural workplaces.

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