From Passive to Active Subjects: 
Gender, Restructuring and Professional/Managerial 
Identities in the UK Public Sector 

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- please note: this is work in progress and we welcome any comments and feedback -
Abstract

This paper presents theoretical and empirical analysis of individual forms of resistance. We draw on the empirical material generated from a two-year study in the Police, Secondary Education and the Social Services in the UK. The research examines the enactment of New Public Management (NPM) in the constitution of professional/managerial identities. The paper explores the ways in which individuals have responded to, and received, the NPM discourse. It examines the nature of professional/managerial subjectivities promoted within NPM. Focusing on the production of meanings at the localised level, the paper presents examples of individual support and subversion. The paper concludes by offering a theoretical conceptualisation of the micro-politics of resistance to illustrate how thought and action, stimulated by tension, discomfort, paradox and difference, may be either one of accommodation, adaptation, or denial.

Introduction

This paper has three interrelated aims. Firstly, taking a gender perspective, the paper explores the differing nature and effects of New Public Management (NPM) for UK public service professionals. Secondly, the paper aims to analyse issues of power and resistance at a localised level. Adopting a Foucauldian Feminist framework, it explores the production of meaning and subjectivity and how individuals come to know and challenge the ways in which their identities are constituted. Fundamentally woven with issues of identity are issues of gender; “the ‘I’ neither precedes nor follows the process of … gendering but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves” (Butler 1993: 7). We conclude by examining the complex and multiple patterns of changing gender relations in public service organisations. Recognition that the social reality of gender relations in organisations is one of asymmetry is important. This is to avoid the tendency of some poststructuralist influenced research to merely engage in ‘language games’ (Gergen 1992) amongst a privileged academic clique, disinterested in the lives and problems of ‘real’ people. Organisations and management are not abstract bodies (Acker, 1990), and this research starts from the premise that organisations are sites of identity construction and contestation. Organisations, organisational processes, and management are arenas of disciplines, with a plurality of competing discourses, some of which are more dominant than others, and which have traditionally privileged and given hierarchical primacy to images of masculinity; symbolically and bodily, the organisation “is a man’s world” (Brewis 1999:85).

There has been considerable interest over recent years in the effects on NPM on public service professionals (Politt 1993, 1995; Kirkpatrick and Martinez Lucio 1995; Exworthy and Halford 1999; Hood et al 1999). The introduction of new management techniques has been seen to strike at the heart of notions of professionalism, having profound implications for status and identity (Halford and Leonard 1999). However, only a few writers have addressed questions of gender construction and gender contestation within public service organisations per se and relating to NPM specifically. Coming from Feminist Standpoint positions, there has been research focusing specifically on women’s marginalized positions and how NPM might affect this (Coyle 1988; Lovenduski 1988; Escott and Whitfield 1995; Margetts 1996). Here the focus has been on how changing structures and management
processes have affected female professionals. However, coming from poststructuralist feminist influenced frameworks, recognising socially constructed nature of organisations, there are a number of studies which have sought to analyse the managerial masculinities embodied within the NPM discourse (see Whitehead and Moodley 1999 edited collection; Leonard 1998; Maddock 1999; Davies and Thomas 2000). These studies illustrate the value of taking a gendered perspective in gaining important insights into the nature and enactment of NPM in public service organisations.

The empirical material presented in this paper is drawn from several sources but primarily from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with middle ranking male and female professionals/managers in two police constabularies, secondary schools from one Local Education Authority and one local authority social services department. From the texts generated, we present analysis of the enactment of NPM and the promotion of new subjectivities. However, professional/managerial identities cannot be simply read off from a ‘given’ NPM. The strength and unity of normalising discourses are highly context dependent. NPM discourse can be understood as one of a matrix of discourses vying for attention in the process of identity makeup. Tensions, contradictions, and internal flaws are revealed as the individual reflects on their self in conjunction with the subjectivising forces of NPM. The paper concludes by considering the different ways in which individuals have resisted elements of the NPM discourse and considers the implications for the nature of gender relations in organisations.

Analysing Identities: The Contribution of a Foucauldian Feminist Framework

The work of Foucault has been taken up by feminist writers to address questions of how power relations are exercised within organisations and the impact of power and knowledge on self-identity, within a historical context (see Weedon, 1987, 1999; Butler 1990, 1993; Nicholson, 1990; Hekman, 1990; Sawicki, 1991, 1994; McNay 1992, 2000; Ramazanoglu, 1993). Ontologically, meanings ascribed to concepts and categories are created through language, historically and culturally situated and therefore multiple and fluid. Therefore, ‘organisation’, ‘profession’, ‘gender’, ‘identity’ and ‘management’ are fluid and precarious (Chia 1996). This presents us with a non-essentialised subject, as identities are constituted and reconstituted through the interplay of multiple discourses. For Foucauldian Feminists, this has meant a move away from ahistorical theories of patriarchy and female subordination to present a more constructive notion of agency that recognises gender identity as robust yet not immutable (McNay 2000). By questioning the notion of fixed and stable gender identities, and the move away from meta-narratives, we open up new spaces for “alternative voices, new forms of subjectivity, previously marginalized narratives and new interpretations, meanings and values” (Weedon 1999:4). Thus we see a shift of focus from presenting women and men as clear cut homogenous groups (hooks 1989) and the reduction of masculinity and femininity to a simple dualism, biologically determined (Alvesson and Billing 1992). The deconstruction of categories of gender enables a multiplicity of individual experiences to be reflected on, therefore, and enables the move away from presenting women as subordinated by male dominance, failing to capture the complexities of agency. From an empirical agenda, this advances theorising from previous management and organisational research that has either negated or privileged the feminine (Alvesson and Billing 1997).

With the gendering of organisational theory, there has been increased attention given to the masculine discourses making up the organisation and management. The modern organisation
and management are both said to privilege dominant notions of masculinity and with them, certain bodies, usually male (Whitehead 1998). Tracing the origins of this, Brewis (1999) highlights the Cartesian split of mind from body, with the mind considered superior. Masculinity has come to mean all that is not emotional; rational, logical and reasoned. Femininity, takes the opposite of this, associated with emotions, empathy, supportive and caring. This separation can be noted in the development of the modern organisation, where the bureaucratic organisational form is championed as an arena of reasoned thinking and ‘cool rationality’ over the private sphere of home where bodily and emotional practices are performed. Reflecting on masculinities in public sector organisations, Brewis (op cit) concludes “powerful discourses around managing the new public sector, and around gender itself, constitute subjects who expect managers to be men, in the most essentialist sense of the word” (1999:90).

In other words, whilst we can see masculinities and femininities as free floating, they are also culturally embodied signifiers of collective identities (Whitehead 1998). Organisations are sites of gender construction and contestation. Gender is a daily achievement. The subject is not a substance but a form (Foucault 1997: 290). It is made up through self-reflection as discourses vie with it to imprint it with their dominant meanings. Gender is what you do at particular times, rather than being a universal who you are: “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender – identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler 1990: 25). However, whilst gender is not wholly determined, neither is it wholly arbitrary. It is not only a construct, it constructs us. Thus the self is regulated but not determined. Symbolically sets of meanings ascribed to male and female influence our identities. Gender differences are constituted in discourse and disciplinary practices, and as individuals (whether knowingly or not) we contribute to this process by turning ourselves into particular (gendered) subjects. So we come to think of ourselves, and interact with others, in ways that reflect dominant understandings of what it means to be either a man or a woman.

**NPM and the Reconstitution of Professional Identities**

This paper is located in the context of the UK public services. These professional-bureaucratic organisations have been identified as sites of, what many observers have characterised as transformative change over the past two decades. This arises from the introduction of wide ranging changes to the structures and management processes, collectively termed ‘new public management’ (NPM). Not unique to the UK, the NPM discourse has been identified in a number of countries, including the UK, US, Sweden and New Zealand (Hood et al 1999; Brunnsson and Sahlin-Andersson 2000). The character and conduct of NPM has stimulated much debate. Despite this, it is generally accepted that increased political attention given to the management of public service professional organisations has been marked by the ascendancy of the managerial prerogative and the legitimacy of management. Common themes underpin these changes, namely, greater financial accountability, the development of a range of measures of efficiency by which individuals, units and organisations are judged, marketisation between service providers and within organisations and the changing relationship between service providers and customers (Osbourne and Gaebler, 1992; Pollitt, 1993, 1995; Hood, 1991; Kirkpatrick & Martinez Lucio, 1995; Hoggott, 1996; Farnham and Horton, 1996; Hood et al 1999).
Fundamental to the restructuring of the public services has been the process of redefining the workforce. A central tenet of NPM has been the promotion of new professional and managerial subjectivities (Miller 1994; du Gay 1996; Halford and Leonard 1999; Whitehead and Moodley 1999; Barry et al 2001), with du Gay suggesting that NPM is an identity project (op cit 1996). During the 1980s public sector professional groups came in for considerable criticism from the New Right, for showing allegiance to their own professional body rather than to senior management or the customer (Crompton 1990). Typified as unaccountable monopolies, professionals were seen at best to be inhibiting the government from bringing in its desired reforms and, at worst, being no better than closed shop trade unions “out to feather their own nests” (Ackroyd and Soothill 1994). A strong focus then of NPM has been the desire to introduce new disciplinary technologies (Townley 1994) designed to inculcate professionals with new attitudes, values, priorities and self-understandings (du Gay 1996; Clarke and Newman 1997). However, as Halford and Leonard (1999) argue, professional/managerial identities cannot be simply read off from a given context of change. There is a need to understand the many and complex ways in which individuals respond to the dominant discourses of the organisation. Therefore, we need to move away from deterministic accounts that present individuals as passive recipients of the discourses of change. There is also a need to move away from the presentation of public service professionals/managers as a homogenous social group that experience NPM in the same way. The enactment of NPM can be understood more as a contested terrain (Barry et al 2001; Goode and Bagilhole 1998), recognising the fluidity of meanings ascribed to NPM as to organisation. It is this that forms the focus of this paper, namely how and in what ways has NPM been responded to and received, supported and subverted by individual professionals/managers in the UK public services. It is at this level of identities and subjectivities that we can conceptualise resistance. At the micro-level of experience is where the effects of power are felt and thus it makes sense to resist power at this level (Brewis 1999).

Conceptualising Resistance

Studies on resistance within the field of organisation studies have tended to concentrate on the collective responses of blue-collar, male (or ‘genderless’) workers, in factory settings. These studies have largely ignored gender as a factor influencing resistance activities and managerial and professional employees have also received very little attention (Gottfried 1994; LaNuez and Jermier 1994). Furthermore, analysis of resistance has focused on workers’ reactions to that which is imposed on them, thus reducing them to structurally and empirically determined phenomenon (Scarborough 1998; Knights and McCabe 2000). Thus there is a privileging of structure over agency and an overall neglect, lack of recognition and general ignorance over resistance at the individual level. We need a more detailed and varied understanding of resistance that can account for the differing motivations and ways in which individuals and groups struggle to appropriate and transform symbolic meanings. In addressing these limitations, we have drawn from a Foucauldian influenced conceptual framework, notably from Foucault’s his later work, and the notion of a critical ontology of the self.

Seeing identity in flux, unstable and multitudinous enables a conceptualising of resistance at a localised level – through subversion and remodelling of the ways in which we come to know ourselves (Butler 1990). Thus we take resistance to mean “all behaviours, events and social formations that challenge or disrupt prevailing power relations and the norms that sustain and reproduce them” (Bordo 1993: 199). Resistance comes from challenging subject positions
offered by dominant discourses, constructing alternative or counter discourses (Weedon, 1987). However, as the self is seen as decentred, with no essential self, merely constructed in discourses, has led to criticisms of presenting as a highly deterministic and unidirectional view of identity. This ‘negative paradigm’ (McNay 2000) of subjectification as subjection presents a passive subject that is discursively constructed, portraying individuals as little more than ‘docile bodies’, mere throughputs for various discourses, and the product of power relations and institutions.

Conversely, some have criticised Foucault for presenting too voluntaristic a view of agency, presenting individuals as self-determining, free to choose an identity from a ‘shopping list’ of discourses. A Foucauldian approach to the analysis of power, as a non possessive, pervasive phenomenon, arising out of social relations, can lead to ignoring, or the downplaying of wider structural forms of oppression (Ramazanoglu, 1993), suggesting that individuals are unaffected by the strength of social structures and free of their own discursively constructed self. As Bordo (1993: 199) questions, does an intellectual emphasis on ‘resistance’ really help us to describe and diagnose the politics of the body within the culture in which we live? Quoting bell hooks (1990: 22), she argues that subversion of the dominant ways of seeing and knowing “happens much more easily in the realm of “texts” than in the world of human interaction. […] ‘difference’ is hard-won; it does not freely bloom, insistently nudging its way through the cracks of dominant forms. Sexism, racism and ‘ageism’, while they do not determine human value and choices, while they do not deprive us of ‘agency’, remain strongly normalising within our culture”.

A Foucauldian feminism, whilst offering insights into how power ‘effects’ identities and how individuals daily struggle to deal with this, it can still accept the overarching structures of inequality within society. It can recognise that gender relations vary between different cultures, societies, time and ‘macro-categories’ (such as sexuality, ethnicity, class, age as well as professions) but also within categories (Alvesson and Billing 1997). From a feminist politics, by denying a monocausal source of women’s subordination, it may be argued that there is no feminist praxis (Strickland, 1991; Ramazanoglu, 1993). However, Foucault is actually offering an alternative form of feminist praxis here (Weedon, 1987). Freedom comes from challenging the ways in which an individual is defined, labelled and classified. Rather than focusing on the source of power, the focus is shifted to its role in the production of truth, reality and the human subject (Weedon, ibid.). This involves examining how power is deployed and how it is exercised in the organisation and society. This is through the ‘chipping away’ at the micro politics, at the minutiae of individual disciplinary technologies within organisations that constitute individual subjectivity: “at every moment, step by step, one must confront what one is doing. what one is (Foucault 1984:374). The focus is on day-to-day personal, local level forms of oppression. It is the ‘tactical polyvalence of discourses (Sawicki 1994) that offers the point of resistance “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault 1984: 101). It is the immanent nature of power that presents a broad based conceptualisation of resistance: Through language, individual subjectivity, social institutions and social processes are defined, constituted and contested. It is through language that we become who we are and it is through language that we can become who we want to be. However, we can identify some of the practices of the self and through reflection, critique and problematisation, formulate tactics whereby we can live in the world. We can reinvent ourselves as subjects (a form rather than substance) that meet our preferred position for living with our selves and with others (Danaher et al 2000). As Weedon argues that choices can be made through exploiting the contradictions, weaknesses and gaps between alternative subject
positions: Where there is a space between the position of subject offered by a discourse and individual interest, a resistance to that subject position is produced (Weedon 1987:112-13).

Thus a Foucauldian Feminist approach offers a broad based political resistance (Hekman 1990), focusing on “a strategy that deconstructs masculinist discourses without attempting to resurrect the Enlightenment project of metanarratives and liberation”. However, whilst theoretically there have been many discussions of resistance drawing from Foucault, there are very few illustrations of this applied in organisational settings. As Alvesson and Deetz (2000: 110) observe:

What is lacking, in particular, are serious efforts to ground ideas of local resistance in specific empirical contexts. There is a lot of talk about resistance in the postmodernist industry, but it is highly theoretical, often underdeveloped and generalized, and it remains quite esoteric. We need to go further than repeating programmatical slogans and use and refine the idea in close contact with the lives of subjects in organizational settings.

Thus, there is an under exploration on how individuals undertake critical reflection and action, such that their response, when confronted with discomfort, difference and paradox, may involve accommodation or adaptation as much as denial (McNay 2000).

The Research

The research, following that of a number of other studies (e.g. Halford et al 1997; Farrell and Morris 1999), avoids a single sector focus and acknowledges that different groups of professional managers may have different experiences of NPM. Furthermore, efforts have been made to focus on areas of the public sector (Police, Secondary Education and Social Services) which, although having been radically restructured, have not have previously been the focus of extensive research. All three areas have experienced a period of major change in organisational and management structures and processes. As in other parts of the public service, the pressures to increase efficiency and to deliver a more customer-orientated service have intensified. So too has the emphasis on management and managerial skills in bringing about these changes.

The paper draws on a wider two-year ESRC funded project, comprising three phases. Phase one (conducted spring 1998), comprised in-depth semi-structured interviews with a small sample of senior female professional managers in the three case study sectors. These interviews were important in determining the main themes of the research and the emphasis on only women’s voices at this stage was to ensure that the research conducted represented the views of those traditionally marginalised within these organisations. The themes which emerged from these initial interviews were incorporated within a questionnaire survey, which was distributed to a sample of 1,950 male and female managers/professionals in October 1999. The questionnaire sample was drawn from 21 police constabularies, 11 social services departments and secondary schools from 12 local education authorities. Reflecting the development of increased civilianisation, with specialist functions such as personnel and finance now being managed by civilian personnel, within police constabularies both uniformed officers and civilian personnel were surveyed. Of the 1,950 questionnaires that were sent out, 891 were returned (46% response rate). While a questionnaire research design may be regarded as wholly inappropriate within a social constructionist influenced methodology (Alvesson and Deetz 2000) we would argue that it offered two main benefits. Firstly, it provided us with a general overview and a feel for the way roles and identities are
being reconstructed under NPM and the strength of individual compliance and/or resistance within this process. Secondly, it provided us with a sample of male and female managers within each of these services who were eager to talk to us about their lived experiences of NPM.

The third phase of the project, which took place during 2000/2001, comprised semi-structured interviews with these male and female professional managers in seven case organisations drawn from the three case sectors (3 police constabularies; 2 social services departments and secondary schools from 2 local education authorities). One hundred and five interviews have been conducted with approximately 15 individuals from each case organisation. In addition, information was also collected from senior managers within these organisations relating to the context of restructuring and to equal opportunity initiatives. The paper will draw mainly on the data collected from this final phase of the project. For the purpose of this paper, we present analysis from the interviews of individuals in two police constabularies (North Constabulary and South Constabulary), secondary schools from one Local Education Authority (Secondaryshire) and one local authority social services department (Townville Social Services). The analysis is based on a total of 37 texts from these interviews.

Men and women were targeted both in the questionnaire survey and in the interview phase. The reason for this is not to compare men and women or to present simple binary positions, but to give voice to both sexes and to explore the complex patterns of gender relations at the localised level. Drawing from Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000), the research is located within a critical management / feminist methodology. Therefore, a core aim is to draw attention to and challenge some of the ways in which gender relations are produced and reproduced within the organisation in such ways as to constrain human possibilities. This is to acknowledge the frequent requests from participants in this research process that the research will ‘make a difference’.

Character and Enactment of NPM
NPM has been portrayed as a ‘blanket discourse’, colonising the public services. However, we have sought to move away from images of NPM as a ‘given’, stamping its authority on the hapless professional, in a highly deterministic and unidirectional way. Professional/managerial identities cannot be simply read off from a ‘given’ NPM. Rather, we can understand NPM more as a contested terrain (Goode and Bagilhole 1998; Barry et al 2001), its strength, cohesion and normalising effects highly context dependent.

The questionnaire data, collected in Phase 2 of the research programme, raised attention to the context of change and the reconfiguration of professional/managerial identities. The questionnaire indicated that the professional/managers within the three public services are now being ‘told to be different’. The majority of the questionnaire respondents (ranging from 70% to 90%) from all the different professional groups stated that the tasks and priorities associated with their present role had changed a great deal over the last 10 years. There was now a much greater emphasis on financial and budgetary responsibility, public accountability, performance monitoring, strategic planning, client or ‘customer’ responsiveness, multi-agency partnerships and the need to respond rapidly to external demands. These changing priorities have led to a requirement for new skills and competencies and the promotion of new managerial subjectivities within these public services. The majority of questionnaire respondents, for example, indicated that individuals were now expected to be more competitive, entrepreneurial and flexible. A very high percentage of respondents from the
three services indicated that relationships with colleagues had become more competitive over the past 10 years.

This information provides a background to the interviews, a context of change, turbulence and heightened ordering and reordering of professional/managerial subjectivities. Focusing on this, we sought to examine the enactment and character of NPM at the localised level. Focusing on the normalising discourse of NPM then, we sought to understand its strength and unity, and the promotion of particular new professional/managerial (gendered) subjectivities.

Within the police case studies (North Constabulary and South Constabulary) we can see the promotion of a new professional/managerial police profile, with the setting down of a set of core managerial and leadership competencies. These emphasise being ‘professional’, complying with strong ethical standards, being strategic and having ‘leadership skills’. Steve, a police superintendent from North Constabulary with over 25 years service commented that it is the strategic and managerial qualities that are now valued, rather than doing operational work, or as he put it, ‘real police work’. A strong performance culture which creates and sustains high-pressure jobs requiring individuals to work longer and harder, can be seen. Fundamental to the ‘police ethic’ is the need to demonstrate commitment. This is evidenced by visibility on the job, ‘being available’, working long hours as a ‘badge of pride’, and ‘living on the job’. Commitment underscores a police officer’s reputation. Jim, a highly specialised civilian manager commented: ‘You are made to feel guilty [if you don’t work these hours] and there are no ‘militants’ at this level. Jan, a very senior uniformed police manager spoke of how she was told that it was not acceptable for her to mention her daughter and family commitments:

My secretary was booking an appointment and in doing so she said ‘Oh it depends on whether Ms Jones has to pick her daughter up or not’, and it was reported back to me that it would be advisable for my secretary not to say that to people because people would get the wrong impression.

Added to this is the importance of unquestioning loyalty to the organisation. The committed police officer is a disciplined and obedient subject where challenging behaviour, criticism or questioning is neither welcome not encouraged. For example, Brian, a chief inspector in North Constabulary, who described himself as ‘too interesting, too outspoken and too friendly for the organisation’ spoke of the selection of ‘clones’ into senior management: I think what they want is an android who is totally and utterly without voice, without any potential to go into anything …somebody who is not really human.

Part of this promotion of a more ‘professional’ police officer is the emphasis on Equal Opportunities and a more ‘tolerant’ organisation. Again we see clear expectations on how to behave, with a strong message that ‘gender inappropriate behaviour’ will not be tolerated. Accompanying this is the promotion of a ‘soft’ HR discourse, emphasising mutual respect, and a more relaxed, informal, caring and supportive organisation. Despite this, the performance culture promotes masculine images of the aggressive and ‘pushy’ individual, based on competition, ruthlessness and being target oriented. This masculine subjectivity, however, overlays rather than replaces more traditional images of police, emphasising militaristic forms of virility:

I operate a very different level to the majority of my male colleagues…[…].., its like going into testosterone city. Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!, ‘we do it like this’, and the
blokes all puffing their chests out, and...[...]. there is no doubt about it had I not changed my style and actually upped the little bits of testosterone and been a bit more in yer face, and a bit more against my tendency if you will, I don’t think I would have survived it [Sue, Superintendent in North Constabulary]

Therefore, while the police services and officers are being reconstructed as more professional and managerial as well as more ‘tolerant’, this is in conjunction with a high level of discipline and obedience. Despite promoting discourses of equal opportunities, mutual respect and diversity, the interviewees present images of both traditional police masculine subjectivities, accompanied by new forms of competitive performativity.

In the texts generated from the interviews at Secondaryshire, we also see the promotion of new professional/managerial subjectivities. NPM discourse is aimed at inculcating entrepreneurial zeal into Head teacher identities. Here the effective Head and deputy head teacher is reconstituted as the financially astute, strategic, market oriented leader. Underpinning this is the idea that schools are businesses and should be led by a business leader. Head teachers are urged to take on a more commercial entrepreneurial identity, to “sell your school, to deliver a commodity and to meet demands”. Jenny, a deputy head teacher of a middle school in Secondaryshire, commenting on her Head’s new role observed: “[he’s] just a manger of, it could be anything, oxo cubes or something, for all that person cares, for all that person is allowed to care”.

Added to this we see a far stronger focus on performance and a particular conception of performance, based on quantifiable results. Susan, a female Head of a small community college, commented: every head teacher knows that in the end unless they manage to move the exam results along they’re regarded as a poor head teacher.

NPM was seen to promote particular forms of competitive masculinities. The message is that education is part of the market economy, and an effective Head teacher will be one who gets the best results, and engages in ruthless competition for resources, pupils and the best public profile. Susan, reflected on how, despite her reservations, she felt compelled to take part in this competition. She stated:

This is not about providing a service for the district, it’s not about the children and their educational needs, this is a market economy and they’re the commodity …and you want to grow bigger sunflowers than the man next door to you.

Again, as with the police, the performance culture, as well as the emphasis on competition suggests that professionals within these services are ‘expected’ to work longer hours, and Head teachers and deputies all spoke of having ‘less time off’ and a pressure to work evenings, weekends, during holidays and half-term. The pressure of the performance culture promotes ‘excessive commitment’ to the job. As Jenny argued, explaining why she had decided to delay having children because of work pressures: ‘how can I have a family when we’re a failing school? So I put it on hold again for a year and a half. The strength of the normalising discourses is apparent in the texts of the interviewees. For example, Jenny, again talks of the headship training she is currently undergoing as a ‘military exercise’, drawing on private sector / guru style leadership knowledge:

…it’s a military type, you will think about this, you will do like this...[the message] is to be what they want you to be. They want to clone you all right, and occasionally they will use an entrepreneurial term or concept.
In sum, we can see from the texts that the new professional/managerial subjectivity for school leaders is a strongly normalising one, centred on the small business entrepreneur.

From the social texts generated in our interviews in Townside Social Services, we get the impression of the move towards far greater external controls. NPM is portrayed as a loosely configured set of autocratic and ‘faceless’ management practices, operating in a climate of severe resource constraint and an increased legislative framework. A great emphasis is placed on quantitative measures and performance through circumscribed procedures. This renders professionals/managers highly accountable to these set rules, guidelines and procedures. A strong performance culture was being promoted, focused on highly masculinist images of non-emotional, rational, cold and calculating, target oriented, clinical positivism. The texts are peppered with comments such as “it is seen to be very ruthless”, “you have to comply with the bottom line”, “sink or swim”, “it’s everyone for themselves”, “dog eat dog”, “zero defects”, “they will crucify you if something goes wrong”. As with the police, we can also see the strong emphasis on the docile subject:

I feel a lot more disempowered. [...] there’s far less creative thinking ‘cos I don’t have time, and I think it’s not actually encouraged much either” (Bob, Team Manager, Child Protection).

However, whilst the image of NPM is clear, there was less clarity over exactly what was expected of the individual from the organisation. As Jonathan, a manager in a residential children’s home commented: “It’s like a little child and it’s sort of lashing out in all directions and it’s not really clear about what’s happening and where it’s going”. However, the focus on performance was clear. As Joe, a team leader in child protection argues: “The perfect manager is one who eliminates all risk from within the functions of the department. It’s almost like one is judged on a set of 100% perfections”. Thus the changes can be viewed more as the enactment of a range of disciplinary technologies. NPM was seen as deskilling and deprofessionalising social work managers/professionals, through the exertion of external bureaucratic procedures:

I think is a lot more procedure based, a lot more.. yes.., um, ‘make sure that this is done and that’s done’, and therefore almost by process you end up with good practice at the end of it [Bob, manager, child protection].

Again, we see the performance culture promoting a climate of work intensification. This was particularly acute in Townside Social Services due to resource constraints from a low spend Authority and staff shortages from high turnover, recruitment problems and a critically high number of staff on long-term sick leave. Restructuring, new legislation, and heightened media attention over social work activities (especially in Child Protection) add further pressures, anxiety and stress for the individuals interviewed in the case organisation.

In sum, our social services case presented a far less clear normalised professional/managerial profile. However, a strong performance culture with highly circumscribed targets was seen to be curtailing professional discretion and power.
Identity and Resistance

Seeing NPM as one of a matrix of discourses vying for attention in the process of identity make-up, we can understand an individual’s identity as a kaleidoscope, forming patterns that have some sense to them but are in no way fixed or settled. The individual is engaged in a constant process of identity construction as they reflect on their self in conjunction with the subjectivising forces of NPM discourse. The struggle between the subject and power/knowledge is never predictable or certain (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000: 230).

Again, we took as our starting point, images arising from the questionnaire survey. We drew a strong message that certain aspects of the changes taking place were seen to be positive by the respondents. Certain aspects of NPM can be seen to coincide with notions of professional identities, ‘doing a good job’. NPM can be seen to contain seductive and moral elements contained in notions of doing the right thing and doing things right. Whether it is believed or acted upon, it is difficult to speak out against it.

Within the three services, there were certain aspects of changes that were generally greeted as positive. These were ones that coincided with notions of professionalism and greater transparency of performance requirements and procedures. The appeal of NPM to efficiency and effectiveness, and being focused on the best use of resources, can be seen to coincide with notions of professionalism and public service ethics:

I don’t know whether it’s public service ethos, or whatever, but there is, you know, a commitment, I think, with the wanting to do a good job. And I think that there’s been a lot of extra demands placed on us, and, how can I put it, it’s hard to argue against them because they have improved things quite a lot, in terms of what we do, compared with how we did things 10 years ago (Joe, Team Leader, Social Services).

In the police, the promotion of a more EO culture, a more professional force and clearer performance guidelines and criteria were all highlighted in a positive light. For example, Jane, a senior uniformed officer comments on the promotion of a more tolerant and diversity organisation: I suppose being a gay woman … because you go through a history I suppose in the police of keeping it secret. Jane goes on to say that she has full support from senior management, and that “it’s just a lovely environment to work in, you know, its great”.

Furthermore, many texts present the ‘buzz’ from being involved in demanding and interesting work. For example Sam, a female Head teacher spoke of the importance of focusing on a wider agenda and of being strategic:

I think its good for you to do that because otherwise your brain cells get atrophied into the managerial side of keeping the school running – which you know is your comfort zone really.

The questionnaire also sought to identify individual’s notion of their professional/managerial identity and to examine how this ‘fitted’ with the new norms. A total of 11 dimensions (for example ‘aggressive’, ‘authoritarian’, ‘bureaucratic’, ‘democratic’) were investigated, to position self and organisational norms. In all three public services, respondents rated the style of their organisation to be more aggressive, authoritarian, bureaucratic, macho, paternalistic and secretive. They rated their own style to be more consensual, democratic, participative and innovative. Whether or not this is to present their self in a better light, this does suggest that reconstituted managerial subjectivities may create certain difficulties and tensions for
professionals within these services. Individuals may therefore take on some aspects of the subjectivising effects of NPM whilst attempting to subvert and ‘wriggle out’ of the other ways that NPM attempts to classify, determine and categorise them. In other words, there is both pain and pleasure from normalising discourse. Thus it can be seen that the enactment of NPM within the three cases is far from clear cut and cohesive. We get the impression of contradictions and internal flaws within the discourse. Tensions create spaces for alternative subjectivities and the assertion of alternative identities (Weedon 1987). To illustrate this, we highlight four examples of these tensions.

**NPM as a Distraction from Professional Work**

Firstly, individuals drew on notions of professional identity to highlight how NPM was a distraction from what was seen as the more important professional work within these three services. Within the police service, for example, both uniformed and civilian officers voiced these tensions. Many uniformed officers constructed their identities on the basis of their ‘operational’ experience. The discourse of NPM, with its emphasis on management, budgets and strategic planning was thought to be in conflict with the ‘real’ police work of ‘going out and fighting crime’. Steve, the Superintendent from North Constabulary, summed up this tension: ‘We have lost our way with trying to be all things to all people. We are not focused anymore, we are not actually delivering what people want’.

Civilian managers within this same force also spoke of feeling uncomfortable with the discourse of NPM, and in particular with what they saw as the need to take on a more generic management identity. They presented an alternative and preferred subject position which drew on professional or specialist discourses. Jim, the civilian manager, who had worked within this specialism in North Constabulary for the past 30 years, said that he had a problem with being called a ‘manager’: ‘it is a particularly technical role, its not a management role’. He tells how his job title has recently changed from supervisor to ‘manager’ and he voices resentment towards the managerial tasks that he now has to perform and what he sees as name changing for the sake of ‘corporate identity’:

> There are more and more meetings that you are having to attend to in your management role so there are all sorts of meeting, seminar projects, lord knows what and all of them, from my own personal point of view, are distractions from the main issue which is getting the job done.’

He continued by saying: *they want individuals who have expertise in their field to have learned over a period of time to become company directors and corporate image producers. Jim reacts very negatively to being constructed as a ‘manager’ and to the attempts to colonise his own sense of identity and behaviour by the need to be ‘corporate’:*  

> The word ‘corporate’ springs into everything these days. You can even be told off for answering the telephone in a non-corporate manner…There is now a written formal way that you are supposed to pick up the telephone .

In response to such constructions, we sense his defiance and also, in some respects, defeat when he says:

> It’s like the organisation can call me what they like, but I know what I am’ And I think there are several people who feel the same way as I do, ‘what’s in a name’. But at the
same time I do understand that things have changed and they are not going to go back to the old ways. People accuse me of being lost in the 60s.

Within secondary education, Head teachers and deputies in Secondaryshire also voiced a tension between how they saw themselves as an “educational leader” and what they saw as the expectations from the Local Education Authority (LEA) and the government to be a “business manager”. According to John, a secondary school head teacher:

There’s a conflicting message which is to do with running a business. You know we think you should be taking on all these additional delegated powers, you should run the school meals service, you should run your own grounds maintenance. We’re going to give you all the money and you don’t need support services around. And that seems to me to be saying that the head shouldn’t be the educational leader…

Many of the head teachers voiced professional concern of the performance targets that were set for their school. Janet, a female head teacher of a large community college, stated that there were often disagreements between her and the LEA over her own personal targets. “I expect I’ll be told that I’ve got to firm these up and make sure they’re smart targets”. Her reply to being told that her targets are “too large” or “beyond your control” is “don’t ask me to choose silly little targets that are not actually my major priorities for the coming academic year”. Janet, again deviant, talks about the importance of having “your own style and of standing up for your school and your own professional judgement”.

Similar tensions, drawing on a professional discourse, can be interpreted from the text of the senior social worker managers. They spoke of the conflict of adhering to a range of compliance standards and actually doing the day-to-day social work. David, a senior social worker, believed that ‘the professionalism has become second to the ticking of boxes’. Another social worker manager, Tom, also raised similar concerns: ‘We’re becoming obsessed by that quantitative stuff. You get this scenario where you don’t get good practice, you get good procedures compliance’.

**NPM as Disempowered and Docile Bodies**

Many of the frustrations and tensions raised by the managers from all three services related to feelings that the subject positions that they were being offered were disempowered and docile. Within both police cases, the texts of many of the uniformed police professionals/managers, in particular, suggested that the police service is a highly disciplined organisation. These individuals recognise that to question or criticise is viewed as lacking commitment and that such behaviour can result in individuals being sidelined or marginalised within the organisation. Again, we can see from Steve’s, text references to the ‘dopes’ who do not recognise that ‘saying bad things ain’t going to win you any favours’. He recalls how he was once duped into believing he had a ‘voice’ which would be listened to, but ‘later discovered that the decision had already been made’. Steve, while to some extent is resigned to this subject position, his tension and frustration with what it offers or fails to offer also shows:

When I signed up that’s what I signed up to do, no point in taking your bat home, you know, but it doesn’t make me any happier with it, its just the way it is. That’s showbiz and this ain’t Hollywood.
Civilian managers, more than the uniformed officers, were refusing to demonstrate this unquestioning loyalty to their force. Several of these managers expressed the view that their expected role was never to challenge the authority and decision-making of the uniformed hierarchy, and many were convinced that they were recruited because they were cheaper. However, many of these civilian managers resented the failure on the part of their senior officers and the senior uniformed ranks to recognise the value of their professional expertise. Often drawing on professional expertise to assert identity, we see evidence of civilians feeling disempowered. Catherine, a senior civilian manager in North Constabulary, spoke of not being prepared to compromise on professional standards:

‘I sit as a chair of a National Association of people who do my kind of work and I feel if I compromise on those things then I am putting my professional reputation at stakes and I’m not prepared to do that. It is interesting in talking to my colleagues, I haven’t found any of them saying I’ll just keep my head down and get on with it…’

Geoff, another civilian manager from North Constabulary, voiced frustration at his limited influence. He spoke of being accused of ‘being negative’ when he has constructively challenged requests or ‘orders’ from uniformed officers

‘I hope a time will come when myself [describing the type of civilian manager he is] …can make the final decision. At the moment I cannot, it’s still the [uniformed officer] who makes that final decision. I wouldn’t say often, but occasionally it’s the wrong decision, but I still have to go along with it.

He suggested that there tended to be more conflict with junior uniformed officers who are new in post and trying to make their mark – ‘They are the ones that you can really have conflict with. They really are - ‘I am the boss, you will do as I tell you’. They are the ones that haven’t really come to terms with how to handle a civilian yet.’

In the Secondaryshire, while recent changes have been seen as offering greater autonomy and responsibility, we have also seen, as in the text of Jenny, that ‘what a head teacher is’ or ‘what that person is expected to do’ is very clearly specified. However, we see in the texts of many of these teachers a clear professional vision and strength of purpose and how they draw on this professional discourse to create a less constrained subjectivity which challenges and ignores requests or edicts from the LEA or government. We can see this in the text of Susan, the Head teacher of a small community college:

As an intelligent and caring person you make your decision on how far or not you are going to, how much lip service you’re going to give to it and whether you’re going to go in to it wholeheartedly…I understand the context within which my school works and therefore I understand the context in which I apply all the things that come down from above. I’m quite a good girl really but I am naughty at times.’

Janet, another Head of a larger community college, also spoke of being prepared to challenge and be critical but perhaps conveying the impression of compliance with a particular request: ‘…infinitely interpreting what comes down so being prepared to say ‘yes’ …when you know perfectly well it is not what the government intended’.

This view that NPM, in its various guises, presents a challenge to professional skills and discretion, can also be interpreted from the texts of social work managers and, as in the other
public services, the construction of this ‘dismayed’ subject position has created tension and criticism. Social workers were seen to draw on their professional identities to critique what they saw as a reduction in their discretion and creativity as a result of increased compliance requirements and legislation. This whole process was criticised as one of ‘deprofessionalisation’.

According to Tom:

We have a lot less professional autonomy because of all these compliance tasks, they must be done and, on an anecdotal level, you know, many of the issues that are regarded as a professional decisions are now taken away from us. There’s a lot more responsibilities, there’s a lot more accountability but there’s a lot less professional autonomy.

And he continued:

It’s almost like you need less and less bright people doing social work because actually what you don’t want them to do is kind of really think too much about the wider issues, the wider aspects of what they’re doing, what you want them to do, really, is to do what they’re told.

**NPM as Managerial Masculinity**

New public management has been presented as promoting new forms of masculinities constituted around a norm of ‘hard managerialism’ (Maddock and Parkin 1993; Thomas 1996; Halford et al 1997). Kerfoot and Knights (1993) have illustrated a gendered subtext of competitive masculinity: long hours, visibility, self-sacrifice, which “valorises the independent, lone individual with no other commitments”. The texts of our public service professionals reveal the tensions and challenges surrounding the promotion of these types of masculine subjectivities. Many of the professionals in all three services voiced concern about the intensification of their role, about long working hours and the pressures to display competitive presenteeism. Several commented that the subject positions created meant that they could no longer perform their role as they would have liked, and we see in some texts a psychological withdrawal from the holy grail of high performance. The message being that to hang on to this ideal was the route to unbearable personal stress and illness. Therefore, with some of the professionals within these services, there is evidence of putting boundaries around what they can do and what they can achieve. Phil, a senior police superintendent from North Constabulary, spoke of his recognition that you have to operate within certain parameters and that what they are asking is impossible. He stated: ‘You need to get pragmatic and say we can’t do that …not feel guilty for not achieving it’.

This insistence at not being made to feel guilty about any failure to perform also came through strongly in the texts of both teachers and social workers. Janet, our head teacher for example, spoke of her refusal to be ‘overstressed’ and her refusal ‘to blame yourself for everything that goes wrong …we’re doing the best job we can’. Francis, a team manager in Social Service, was also clear in the alternative subject position that she had offered herself:

There’s a limit to what I can do, that’s the only way I can deal with it, by being clear about what I can and can’t do. I regularly write memos up the line and keep copies to say that because we haven’t got enough clerical support this work hasn’t been done.
Francis spoke at length of her refusal to take on the blame for the state of the service she was offering. She talked of the successive cuts from the budget by the Authority and the loss of any public service ethic.

When you first start you’ve got this idea about going out and helping and you realise that you just provide services and you had a romantic view. You know you’ve got to go through all these changes haven’t you and now I feel that they voted for this lot [Conservative run Council]. If they don’t like what they’re getting that’s their tough luck. It’s a low spend authority – that’s what you voted for.

Many of these professionals simply refused to perform certain tasks. The phrase ‘I just don’t do it’ was often quoted in relation to a number of tasks that they were ‘expected’ to perform. Many were also ‘seeing’ the light in terms of long working hours, making sure work ‘cannot take over everything’ or ‘trying much more to balance things and keeping work and home life distinct and separate.

The promotion of dominant discourses of competitive masculinity with an emphasis on long working hours, competition and positivist measures of performance, created particular tensions for some female professionals in the research. For these women, the dominant masculinities created tensions and feelings of ‘otherness’. Sue, a superintendent in North Constabulary criticised the dominant culture of the force as one of institutional arrogance and the ‘belief that the white male way is the only way’. Helen, a female inspector in South Constabulary pointed out that ‘as a policewoman, there isn’t 100% comfortableness …it is very isolating and it is quite lonely. Catherine, the civilian manager in North Constabulary also spoke of how she and other senior civilian and uniform managers, many of whom were women, were struggling with what they saw as an organisational bullying regime within the force. She spoke how they often meet informally an ‘talk about ways of doing something about it and we’ve tried to make our voices heard’

This critique of highly masculinist and aggressive ways of working was also offered in the texts of female head teachers who drew on feminine discourses and embodied notions of womanhood, in terms of being more compromising, caring and student focused.

Male heads are much more hard headed. They have less emotion than I do. They are probably less caught up with the children than I am. And I doubt if there are many heads that teach as much as I do. And I doubt that there are as many heads who know their children as well as I do…. They don’t see it as part of their role [Susan, Head teacher]

NPM as Soft Managerialism and Managing Diversity

In previous sections we have argued that there is a lack of cohesion within New Public Management discourses and we can see how the promotion of a soft managerialism and an emphasis of equal opportunities and diversity may conflict with a hard managerialist agenda. In the same way that we saw tensions created by the construction of subject positions that valorised competitive masculinity, the texts of some of the participants were critical of the promotion of a much softer HRM agenda within their organisations. For example, we can see civilian and uniformed managers within South Constabulary talk of frustration and demonstrate cynicism to the promotion of Equal Opportunity policies and grievance
procedures within that force. Ted, the civilian middle manager, who had worked in private industry for many years before joining the police service, was “appalled” at his lack of influence and control, and felt strongly that he has lost his right to manage. He resents being offered a subject position in which as a manager he is expected ‘to hold their [subordinates] hands’:

We are quite weak with the way that we are able to manage our staff and I know that goes into the police staff as well. We have got similar issues whereby the police officer tells somebody what to do and they are able to raise a grievance and not do what they are being told to do.

Ted talks at length about his inability to influence his workforce and discipline individuals who are not performing or who are misbehaving: ‘I want to know that I can deal with it. It’s not going to be swept under the carpet and say well I’m sorry it’s to hard to do or you can’t really do that’. Sally, a female superintendent at South Constabulary, also referred to the cynical reactions to soft ‘HR’ practices, which she says is referred to by many as the goody two-shoes stuff that is laid down by the Chief Constable on valuing diversity, leading by example.’ There was also some reference in the text of a number of professionals in this force that equal opportunities had gone too far, reduced things to ‘an antiseptic level, less banter’ and ‘they’ve taken the fun out of it’.

Similarly, there were some social work managers who suggested that NPM was still too bureaucratic and not ruthless or enterprising enough. Jonathan, a social work manager with a background in industry, voiced his frustration with the continuation of a bureaucratic and procedural emphasis, drawing frequently on an enterprising, innovative managerial identity during the interview: ‘They don’t want someone who wants to get ahead, who’s quite ruthless, because they are going to cause problems, be too dynamic’. He continues to say “I can produce a hell of a service...[....].. but I can make it better if I’m allowed to shape it myself and not be constantly stifled from above”

Another social work manager, Margaret, (from a private sector, non practitioner background) also revealed tensions from being offered a subject position that was too informal and not sufficiently focused on ‘performance’.

I often wonder why I’m in social services – I often wonder really whether I am temperamentally suited to work in social services, I do find the woolliness quite difficult to deal with because I like organisation and I feel this is a chaos organisation. I think I’m a bit too formal...

Discussion

Resistance is that struggle we can most easily grasp. Even the most subjected person has moments of rage and resentment so intense that they respond, they act against... That space within oneself where resistance is possible remains...That process emerges as one comes to understand how structures of domination work in one’s own life, as one develops critical thinking and critical consciousness, as one invents new alternative habits of being and resists from that marginal space of difference inwardly defined (hooks 1990: 15)
The focus of this paper has been to lay open those spaces where tensions and resistance to NPM reside. Adopting a Foucauldian Feminist framework, resistance is conceptualised at the level of identities and subjectivities and comes from challenging subject positions offered by dominant discourses. Resistance therefore is not understood in the traditional collective sense or even at the behavioural level. Rather it is seen as a constant process of adaptation, subversion and reinscription of these dominant discourses. This takes place as individuals confront and reflect on their own identity performance and in doing so pervert and subtly shift meanings and understandings. Our identities are fraught with contradictions that we work on to resolve. This is an on-going process arising from the desire to gain the security and comfort that resides in knowing ourselves, dealing with the tensions and discord that arises from these contradictions.

Within this study, we have explored the meanings given by individuals to the dominant discourse of NPM, the new subject positions it is understood to promote, and the alternative or counter discourses asserted by the study participants, that are seen to challenge it. The empirical material presented reveals how the discourses of NPM are not clear cut or cohesive, promoting a variety of subject positions, elements of which are supported, whilst other parts are subverted by the individual. Analysis of the texts generated in the research, suggests that part of the discourse of NPM is underpinned by a particular notion of competitive masculinity (Kerfoot and Knights 1993). The creation of high-pressure managerial jobs, linked to long working hours, greater individualism and competition sustains and promotes strong images of masculinity within these organisations. We saw, especially in the cases of the police and secondary education, how these discourses appeal to images of being a man, positioning women as ‘the other’. The dominance and privileging of these discourses should be acknowledge and reveal the asymmetrical relations of gender and power within these organisations. As Brewis (1999: 92) has argued: ‘The undertaking of a more masculine identity project can be seen to render the individual a successful organisational subject, someone who is ‘fit’ to join the ranks of management; there is pressure to appear outwardly masculine in one’s working life, even if one is biologically female. Collinson and Collinson (1997: 402) also concluded, in their study on restructuring in the financial services, that restructuring practices ‘may undermine men’s managerial power in one sense, but they could also reproduce and reinforce male domination of management in another. However, even these discourses, while strong and normalising, cannot and should not be viewed as deterministic. We have presented evidence from the micro-level of individual experiences of these discourses being subverted and denied at the level of subjectivity and identity. Male and female professionals in all three sectors were seen to be drawing on professional identities, as well as privileging their lives outside work in the process of offering themselves alternative subject positions. Many of the female professionals were also seen to be drawing on a ‘cultural script of femininity’ (Fine and McPherson 1994) to critically reflect and critique the highly masculinist subject positions they were being offered.

However, as we have argued, the discourse of NPM is neither coherent nor unified. In contrast to this thrusting, masculinist profile we also provide evidence of the promotion of disciplined and docile subject positions within the public services studied, together with the promotion of a more tolerant, looser and ethical organisation. We again see, at the micro-level, tensions and critiques, with individuals promoting alternative subject positions to those on offer.

The paper presents a critique of overly deterministic portrayals of NPM. While acknowledging the strength of new disciplinary technologies (Townley 1994) and the crusade
throughout the 1990s to inculcate public sector professionals with new attitudes, values, and identities, we emphasise that individuals are not passive recipients of these discourses. Identities, we have suggested, are constituted and reconstituted through the interplay of multiple discourses. Fundamental to the concept of identity is gender, and we argue against any notion of fixed and stable gender identities. As Butler (1990) suggests, gender is performative, i.e. it is constructed in and through the deed. In this research we have presented both male and female professionals who are active in their engagement with the discourses of NPM and exercise power in the way they position themselves and find their own location (Kerfoot and Knights 1994). We therefore move far away from any simplistic notions of what it is to be a woman, or a man, or a public sector professional, emphasising the importance of multiple voices and representing the multiplicity and complexity of individuals. This means that there are many possibilities for alternative identities to be played against conventional ways in which we are constituted.

Within this paper we have provided substantial evidence that NPM is an identity project (du Gay 1996) and more significantly we have provided empirical evidence of the ways that alternative identities are pitched against dominant ways in which we are constituted, either as male or female, professional or manager. Our analysis of resistance mainly resides at the level of identity and subjectivity although there is recognition and evidence of the importance of resistance behaviours. However, as Rich (1987:94, quoted in Sawicki 1994:308) argues: ‘Breaking the silences, telling our tales, is not enough. We can value the process – and the courage it may require – without believing it is an end in itself.’ So we ask does this research satisfy a feminist and critical management methodology (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000)? Does it draw attention to and challenge the ways in which gender relations are produced and reproduced so as to constrain human possibilities? In other words, we need to understand how resistance as we have conceptualised it here may transcend the local, individual sphere in order to transform collective behavioural norms (McNay 2000). For all the men and women involved in this study, we carry a burden of debt and a responsibility to have their voices heard. We offer this research neither as a quest for the answer, nor to discover the truth. Rather we aim to present an arena where multiple voices can be heard and a stimulus for the development of organisations where multiple identities can be performed.

Notes

1 Various terms have been used to collectively describe the changes taking place in the public sector over the past 2 decades. These include ‘new managerialism’, ‘managerialism’ and (our preferred term) ‘New Public Management’.

2 Discourses are “historically variable ways of specifying knowledge and truth”. They are defined as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak…. [Discourses] do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention” (Foucault 1974: 49). Discourses produce “disciplinary regimes” in organisations; their normalising effects determine who and what is normal, standard and acceptable (Townley 1994). Through discourse, individual subjectivity, social institutions and social processes are defined, constituted and contested.

3 We are interested in public sector workers who have professional backgrounds, be they teachers, social workers, police offices, but who are clearly performing managerial roles in the organisation. For simplicity, we refer to these as professionals/managers. A large body of knowledge has been devoted to the differences between professional workers and managers and, more specifically on the changing professional/managerial dynamics in the public sector. For details on these debates, see Exworthy and Halford (1999).
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It must be pointed out that: (a) Foucault would object to being classified as having a specific theoretical approach, being more concerned with debunking existing philosophical, or epistemological, frameworks and in no way constructing an alternative, and (b) that Foucault’s own work is difficult to classify and summarise, given the shifts and changes in his writing over the 30 year period of his writing, with his later work partly being devoted to re-examining and subtly reforming his earlier work.

A Foucauldian Feminist framework takes a ‘soft’ poststructuralist approach (Alvesson and Billing 1997), appropriating the key analytical tools of deconstruction, reflexivity, criticism and problematisation. However, in various ways, feminist writers influenced by Foucault have avoided problems of relativist reductionism and political inadequacy charged at poststructuralism. A Foucauldian Feminist approach focuses on power, questioning the competing and conflicting meanings underlying the historical and social production of discursive practices. It stops short of poststructuralist positions per se which question the stability of meaning in an infinite and never ending deferral. Similarly, it maintains a conception of power (Foucault being particularly attractive to feminists because of his emphasis on the ubiquity of power relations) and therefore avoids the presentation of difference that simply recapitulates to the logic of liberal individualism, or voluntarism.

We recognise that meanings are context dependent. We aim to understand through the lived experiences of those involved in the research process; to give voice. Recognising that meaning is constituted in language and social action, our interpretations are constructions of these meanings and therefore a construction of the construction of the actors studied (Thomas and Pullen 2001).