Critical Perspectives in Work and Organizational Psychology

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Introduction

Work and organizational psychology has long dealt with issues of social and ethical importance, from questions of workplace power and voice (Lam & Xu, 2019) to discrimination and difference (Colella, Hebl & King, 2017), to worker abuse (Hackney & Perrewé, 2018). A core part of the discipline has been to apply psychological theory to understanding questions of justice (Rupp, 2011) and to find ways of promoting well-being (e.g., Athota, Budhwar, & Malik, 2019; Kovacz et al., 2018). Running through this wide gamut of concerns has been the motive to support worker autonomy (Kanat-Maymon & Reizer, 2017) and enhance flourishing at work (Fotaki, Islam, & Antoni, 2019), goals reaching

beyond theoretical debates to promote the social good though impactful and engaged inquiry (*cf.*, Jarzabkowski, Mohrman, & Scherer, 2010). This long-standing motive in applied psychology has navigated deftly between the interests of workers and organizations, attempting to secure positive outcomes for both and promoting employee well-being as a source of value for organizations (Gardner & Schermerhorn, 2004). Such attempts have placed psychologists at the crux of core social tensions (Barley & Knight, 1992) - between individual and collective, social reproduction and social change, profit and well-being – a position that carries institutional and political responsibilities that are often not acknowledged as a field.

Despite the long-standing concern of psychologists with questions of social importance, applied psychology has tended to stray away from examining the societal-ideological influences that explain why organizations may exert unequal power over employees (Bal & Dóci, 2018). In so doing, some have argued that work and organizational psychology, despite its pretentions to well-being, has served as an instrument for social control (e.g., Dashtipour, 2015). To assess the state of the field and build awareness of our role in wider social processes, it is important to engage in a critical debate around work and organizational psychology, and in particular the sociopolitical context in which workplace behavior emerges.

In the last decade, critical scholarship has emerged in the areas of management (with the rise of Critical Management Studies (CMS); Janssens & Steyaert, 2009; Spicer, Alvesson, & Kärreman, 2009, 2016) as well as general and social psychology (Gough, 2017; Teo, 2015). These critical streams have, at least partly, been prompted by escalating social inequality, stratification, and polarization under the global regime of neoliberal financial

capitalism (Bal & Dóci, 2018). In spite of the relevance of these developments for workplace practices (e.g., increased job insecurity, work intensification, and precarious employment, Burchell, Ladipo, & Wilkinson, 2002; Noronha & D'Cruz, 2017) in work and organizational psychology, critical voices have largely remained at the margins of the field (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2019; Gerard, 2016; Islam & Zyphur, 2006, 2009; McDonald & Bubna-Litic, 2017; Parker, 2007). Given the centrality of work to critical theory, particularly in light of current socio-political and economic developments (e.g., Dejours & Deranty, 2010), and the proliferation of critical scholarship around organizations (cf., Prasad, Prasad, Mills & Mills, 2016), the notable lack of critical perspectives within work and organizational psychology demands address.

Emerging literature that takes a critical perspective within work and organizational psychology has noted a tendency towards dominance of managerial agendas guiding mainstream work psychology research (Bal & Dóci, 2018; Gerard, 2016; Islam & Zyphur, 2009). The main goals of critical perspectives in work and organizational psychology have been to expose, analyze, and challenge power structures and workplace inequalities, diverse forms of exploitation and exclusion of individuals and groups (e.g., Banday, Chakraborty, D'Cruz, & Noronha, 2018; D'Cruz, Noronha, & Beale, 2014), highlight how dominant modes of knowledge creation (e.g., neo-positivist epistemology and 'scientific' methodologies) obscure the contextually embedded nature of core constructs, as well as the ideologies underpinning research in the field, which serve to obscure, uphold, or reproduce such detrimental conditions (Bal & Dóci, 2018; Islam & Zyphur, 2009; Parker, 2007). Thus, critical perspectives in work psychology correspond with the knowledge-creating interests of critical theory more broadly, which have been summarized as an empirical-analytical

approach to organizational power and control, a hermeneutic-historical understanding of the meaning of observed phenomena in their historical and cultural contexts, as well as a critical-emancipatory interest in social change (Klikauer, 2015). The current Special Issue (SI) on *Critical Perspectives in Work and Organizational Psychology*, building on these overall goals, has four main aims.

- The SI calls for contributions to advance theoretical understandings of critical work psychology, organizational behavior and management. With a plethora of critical perspectives being available outside these field, such as critical theory (Islam & Zyphur, 2009), interpretive, hermeneutic, and phenomenological traditions (Gerard, 2016), feminist, post-colonial and postmodern perspectives (Lawthom, 1999, Teo, 2015), and psychoanalytic and psychodynamic approaches (Gabriel & Carr, 2002), there are ample possibilities to advance our understanding of phenomena related to applied psychology, and offer important and complementary insights into our research. For instance, critical theory may elucidate the dynamics underpinning shifts in responsibility for well-being, from organizations to individuals, the significance of which leads employees to bear the brunt of work and career challenges (Prilleltensky & Stead, 2013). Such research may focus (1) within the organization to explain sources of workplace exploitation, (2) at the frontiers of the workplace to critically examine issues of exclusion, discrimination, or precarity, or 3) at the field level, critiquing the historical and current modes of knowledge production that are dominant in work and organizational psychology as a whole, or in significant sub-fields, such as organizational behavior and management.

- The SI calls for contributions focusing on critical methods. Specifically, this calls for broadening of the methodological toolkit that is used within work psychology (e.g., Symon & Cassell, 2006). Recent methodological debates around the political and ideological implications of psychological research methods (e.g., Zyphur & Pierides, 2017) have resulted in demands for increased reflexivity around the goals and uses of different methods, both quantitative and qualitative. With the dominance of positivistic and quantitative methods, promoting such reflexivity within work psychology may involve greater exposure to diverse methods, such as critical discourse analysis, critical ethnography (Gerard, 2016), or critical hermeneutic phenomenology (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2018).

- Third, the Special Issue aims at publishing critical approaches towards the relationship between work psychology as a scholarly discipline and as applied practice. Both a methodological and a substantive issue is how researchers and practitioners produce knowledge together. Their relative roles constitute an ongoing source of contention (Islam, 2015). As an applied discipline, it is imperative that critical work psychology informs practice and practitioners, while also drawing its own theorizing from the lived experiences and struggles of workers (Du Gay & Morgan, 2013). Contributions that reframe the scholar-practitioner divide in ways that uphold scholarly values while promoting emancipatory practice are especially welcome.

- Finally, the Special Issue calls for contributions that explore the *international, cultural,* and *contextual* issues of critical work psychology. Critical psychologists have increasingly recognized the role of geopolitical, colonial, and hegemonic practices in

the production of psychological knowledge (Hook, 2005). For critical psychology to adequately promote reflexivity within *mainstream* psychology, it must recognize the location of mainstream psychology within structures of power that privilege knowledge emanating from the Global North. A critical work and organizational psychology would therefore promote a "worlding" of scholarship (Painter, 2015), explicitly aiming to incorporate Non-Western perspectives on work psychology.

The Special Issue welcomes both empirical and conceptual contributions. To stimulate a variety of authors to submit their contributions, the Special Issue welcomes papers ranging from 4,000-10,000 words. Traditional full-length papers are welcome, but the Special Issue also explicitly invites (shorter) essays and discussion pieces.

Submission Instructions

This call is open and competitive, and the submitted papers will be blindly reviewed. Scholars interested in submitting their papers to this Special Issue are encouraged to discuss their preliminary ideas with the Special Issue editorial team (contact Matthijs Bal, mbal@lincoln.ac.uk) before 30 April, 2020. Potential contributors are also encouraged to participate in the Paper Development Workshops organized by the editorial team, preceding the next Future of Work and Organizational Psychology (FoWOP) Meeting, which takes place at VU Brussels, Belgium, September 9-11, 2020, and/or the 1st International Conference on Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology, to be held at the University of Innsbruck, Austria, October 2-3, 2020. The Special Issue is an initiative of the FoWOP Movement. For more information, see www.futureofwop.com.

The deadline for submissions is January 31, 2021, and papers should be submitted online via https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/apps (selecting 'Special Issue Paper' as the manuscript type). Papers should be accompanied by a separate cover letter, and - to be eligible for review - must follow the AP:IR guidelines.

Please direct questions about the submission process, or any administrative matter, to the Managing Editor at appliedpsychol@gmail.com. Please address any content-related questions you may have to Matthijs Bal at mbal@lincoln.ac.uk.

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