

HABITUS, HYSTERESIS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR¹

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Abstract. This paper examines the daily struggles of unionized employees whose municipal workplace was undergoing major change influenced by New Public Management. In-depth interviews with 45 front-line service providers revealed widespread frustration with working conditions and relationships with management. We interpret this response as an embodied expression of hysteresis, a term that Bourdieu used to describe the gap between changing field conditions and habitus. We argue that organizational change posed challenges for these workers because it produced a rupture between their taken-for-granted ways of being a “good” public servant (i.e., public service habitus) and what was expected of them during restructuring. Moreover, on the basis of gendered occupational class differences in employees’ practices, we suggest that hysteresis is itself a socially structured phenomenon that reflects the tacit calculation of what was possible (or not) for workers occupying specific positions within the stratified order of the organization.

Key Words: Bourdieu; habitus; hysteresis; gender; organizational change; new public management; restructuring

Résumé. Ce document examine les difficultés quotidiennes d’employés syndiqués en milieu de travail municipal, dont le lieu de travail subit un changement important sous l’influence du mouvement de la nouvelle gestion publique. Des entrevues approfondies, menées auprès de 45 fournisseurs de services de première ligne, ont permis de révéler leur frustration face aux conditions de travail et à leurs relations avec la direction. Nous interprétons cette réaction comme

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l'expression incarnée de l'hystérésis, le terme utilisé par Bourdieu pour décrire l'écart entre les conditions changeantes sur le terrain et l'habitus. Selon nous, le changement organisationnel présentait des défis pour ces travailleurs, car il causait une rupture entre les façons tenues pour acquises d'être de « bons » fonctionnaires (p. ex., l'habitus de la fonction publique) et ce que l'on attendait d'eux pendant la restructuration. En outre, en nous fondant sur les différences au niveau des pratiques des employés, selon la catégorie professionnelle et le sexe, nous croyons que l'hystérésis est elle-même un phénomène déterminé socialement qui reflète le calcul tacite de ce qui était possible (ou ne l'était pas) pour des employés occupant des postes précis au sein de l'ordre stratifié de l'organisme. Mots clés: Bourdieu; habitus; hystérésis; genre; changement organisationnel; nouvelle gestion publique; restructuration

INTRODUCTION

On January 1, 1998, the “mega-city” of Toronto came into being. It was the outcome of a provincially mandated amalgamation of seven municipalities into a single city and, with a population of 2.4 million, the largest municipal restructuring project ever undertaken in Canada. Engineered ostensibly to improve accountability and create efficiencies that would “save taxpayer dollars,” among the many changes set in motion were staff cuts targeted at 10 percent and a significant structural reorganization. A year after amalgamation, office space had shrunk by 8 percent and 6,000 staff had been moved (Garrett 1999).

If nothing else, amalgamation is a prime example of the then-ruling provincial Conservatives' commitment to “less government” (Sancton 2000). A much-lauded means of achieving this is to bring private sector management practices to the public sector (Clarke et al. 2000; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000). Key discourses underpinning this “New Public Management” (NPM) are that:

[S]ocial progress requires continuing increases in economic productivity; productivity increases come from applying sophisticated technologies; the application of these technologies can only be achieved through a disciplined workforce; business success depends on the professionalism of skilled managers; and to perform their crucial role managers must have the right to manage. (Farnham and Horton 1999:41)

It has been suggested that NPM-based reforms have altered relations between the state and local governance, and realigned professional and managerial cultures around private, rather than public, ethics (Gleeson and Knights 2006:281). This does not mean, however, that the NPM

script has been taken up universally by those charged with public service delivery. Indeed, as we have argued elsewhere (McDonough 2006), public servants on the front lines of services provision have challenged efforts to restructure their workplace in ways more conducive to the market through practices that defend a “traditional” vision of public service. We suggested that such practices can be understood in terms of a public service habitus, a socially constituted set of dispositions representing a vision of public service that privileges the public good over private (selfish) interests. Finally, we noted that their struggle to uphold this vision came with costs that were evident in the disquietude — even anguish — they felt over being unable to provide the level or quality of service that they wished.

In this paper, we explore further the daily struggles of these front-line public servants whose frustration with working conditions and relationships with management emerged as a dominant theme in our interviews. Using Bourdieu’s theory of practice we suggest that their distress can be understood in relation to the hysteresis of the public service habitus. Rarely used in research on organizational change, *hysteresis* is a term that Bourdieu employed to indicate a cultural lag or mismatch between habitus and the changing “rules” and regularities of a field. We argue, further, that hysteresis is itself shaped by the configuration of power relations that constitutes the municipal bureaucratic field; that is, the position-takings that emerge in a shifting organizational context reflect the tacit calculation of what is possible (or not) for agents who occupy specific locations in the stratified social order of the public service (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008; Swartz 1997).

The paper begins with a brief review of dominant theoretical approaches to organizational change in the public sector. Drawing on an application of Bourdieu’s framework to organizational analysis by Emirbayer and Johnson (2008), we then outline briefly Bourdieu’s theory of practice, paying particular attention to his conceptualization of hysteresis. Thereafter, we describe the study upon which the analysis is based and present interview data that illustrate the gendered, class-based nature of the struggle over how to be a public servant under NPM.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Most critical social science research on NPM is based in the UK where the Tories, under Margaret Thatcher’s leadership, embraced the new managerialism before other Western nations, and New Labour followed in their footsteps with calls to “modernize” the public service (Currie et al. 2009; Farnham and Horton 1999; Gleeson and Husbands 2003). This

field of research is generally informed by two theoretical approaches which, while sometimes integrated in a given study, tend to differ in their focus of concern. One is a structuralist-materialist perspective that focuses on the *effects* of NPM on the employment relationship, labour relations, and the nature of work (Bach 2000; Bach and Givan 2008; Bach and Winchester 2003; Corby and White 1999; Gill-McLure and Seifert 2008; Korunka et al. 2003; Morgan et al. 2000). For example, Lloyd and Seifert (1995) documented the short-term and unplanned responses of four large hospitals to an early 1990s reorganization of the National Health Service that restricted hospital budgets and introduced internal competition and trusts for personnel management. Reforms centred on reducing staff which, in turn, intensified work and led to widespread fear of job loss among remaining employees. Lloyd and Seifert argued that this, along with increased monitoring of sickness absence, created a highly stressed and demoralized workforce.

The second, a constructionist approach to sociological studies of NPM, focuses primarily on identity (Gleeson and Knights 2006). According to this Foucaultian-inspired framing, organizational restructuring involves changing the ways workers view themselves on the job and, thus, carry out their work (Du Gay 1996; Llewellyn 2004). From this perspective, institutionally desired outcomes are achieved through workers' embodied enactments of organizationally privileged modes of thought and behaviour (Halford and Leonard 2005). Applied to the public sector workplace, this approach posits that an essential condition of successful restructuring efforts is that the subject positions proffered by NPM discourses (e.g., managerialist, competitive-masculinist, etc.) (Thomas and Davies 2005) are adopted by workers.

As studies concerned with identity have shown, however, a straightforward uptake of NPM discourse is not necessarily assured. For example, research on the micropolitics of the workplace suggests that new "ways to be" under NPM are often loose and contradictory, and compete with subject positions suggested by alternative discursive frameworks (Thomas and Davies 2005). Of particular interest to our study is how discourses of NPM may conflict with those exemplifying the tacitly articulated public service culture of local government that developed in the closing years of the 20th century, including, among others, a commitment to the public interest, civic duty, and self-sacrifice (Gill-McLure 2007; Perry 1997; Pratchett and Wingfield 1996). Also relevant in the context of our study sample are discourses that inform professional identities. Notably, group members' inculcation into various professions draws heavily from broadly shared discourses of autonomy, moral integrity, and a commitment to upholding universal standards (Evetts 2009; Freidson

2001; Jacques 1996). Hence, the views of self and practices associated with a professional habitus (Beck and Young 2005) may conflict with those of the self-interested entrepreneur as promoted by NPM. This discursive struggle may be particularly acute for public servants in caring professions (e.g., nursing), who may have difficulty enacting an ethic common to highly feminized professions — service to others and putting the needs of clients/patients above all else (Abbott and Meerabeau 1998; Abbott and Wallace 1990).

While structuralist and constructionist approaches make important contributions to a critical analysis of NPM, they have been criticized for their tendency to privilege either structure or agency, and to neglect a consideration of the co-constitutive character of change in the workplace. For example, the gap between NPM workplace policy and worker practices has led Halford and Savage (1995:98) to point out that the structuralist critique of NPM suffers from an “instrumental, economically-rational view of organizations” that separates organizational structures from the people they employ. That is, it implicitly accepts the view that restructuring is something that happens to people “rather than as something which happens because some people choose (albeit not necessarily in conditions of their own choosing) to make it happen” (Halford and Savage 1995:100). On the other hand, inasmuch as the constructionist approach highlights the formative links between managerialist discourses and worker subjectivities, its emphasis on the contingent and precarious nature of power relations may downplay the relatively stable features of power that coalesce in organizations (Newton 1998).

Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice is particularly well-suited to respond to concerns raised about structuralist-materialist and constructionist accounts of NPM, given its ability to accommodate a focus on both the dynamics of domination and the reproduction and contestation of domination through practice. Emirbayer and Johnson (2008) use Bourdieu’s three conceptual pillars — field, capital, and habitus — to analyze hierarchical relations in organizations. They conceptualize field as a “terrain of contestation between occupants of positions differentially endowed with the resources necessary for gaining and safeguarding an ascendant position within that terrain” (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008:6). These positions and the forces that connect them constitute a “*structure or a temporary state of power relations*” (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008:6, emphasis in original) that reflects ongoing struggles for domination. Such struggles are waged over and with the particular types of resources or capital (i.e., economic, social, cultural, and symbolic) that are deemed to be valuable and distributed differentially within a field at a given time.

Considered as a field, an organization is not only a space of objective positions occupied by members who possess different types and amounts of capital. It is also a cultural structure reflecting members' practices or, in Bourdieu's (1996:235) words, "things 'to be done,' ... adversaries to combat, established position-takings to be 'overtaken.'" Crucially, positions and position-takings in an organization are homologous and mutually constitutive because their source lies in the habitus — a system of dispositions or forms of know-how and competence with emotional, cognitive, and bodily dimensions — that generates practice (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008:27). Habitus gives rise to a sense of what actions are possible (and impossible) for agents variously positioned within an organization. Conditioned by both social origins and subsequent experiences and, thus, durable *and* transposable, habitus operates largely below the level of consciousness and provides members of an organization with a framework for accomplishing "appropriate" practice. For example, as we suggested in our earlier work, the tacit recognition of a "traditional" vision of public service (i.e., the public service habitus) lay at the heart of workers' enduring practices of altruism, advocacy, and community development in the face of market encroachment (McDonough 2006).

Despite all appearances, the frequent adjustment of the habitus to the objective conditions of a field should not be treated as a universal rule (Bourdieu 1990). Relevant for our discussion of NPM is that habitus has "critical moments when it misfires or is out of phase" (Bourdieu 2000:162), particularly when a field undergoes a major transformation that dramatically changes its rules or regularities. Because the habitus has a degree of inertia or a spontaneous tendency to reproduce itself and, thus, perpetuate the objective structures that produced it, some agents may have difficulty generating practices that correspond with the new order. Bourdieu refers to this mismatch or disjuncture between habitus and field as hysteresis. In such cases, individuals' "dispositions become dysfunctional and the efforts they make to perpetuate them help to plunge them deeper into failure" (Bourdieu 2000:161). The notion of hysteresis, then, highlights the disparity between the new opportunities associated with field change and agents whose habitus leaves them unable (temporarily, at least) to recognize the value of new positions. Hence, hysteresis provides a means of linking the objective nature of workplace change with the subjective nature of individual responses (Hardy 2008).

In what follows, we draw on the concepts of habitus and hysteresis to explore the struggles of unionized municipal employees during a period of NPM-inspired organizational change. We argue that changing field conditions posed challenges for front-line staff because they represented a rupture between their taken-for-granted ways of being a "good" public

servant and what was expected of them under NPM. In this sense, workers' frustrated responses to restructuring are understood as expressions of a public service habitus that encounters difficulties generating practices that conform to new social conditions within which it is now required to function (Wacquant 2005). Before presenting our analysis of the workers' struggles, we describe the context of public service restructuring in Toronto, followed by our data collection methods and analytic process.

STUDY CONTEXT

The most recent phase of restructuring local government in the Toronto area began in earnest when amalgamation was set in motion on January 1, 1998. Along with other critical changes in provincial policies that saw the slashing of provincial transfer payments, the overhauling of the property tax system, and the downloading of costs for social housing, public transit, and other social programs to municipalities (Kipfer and Keil 2002), amalgamation had major implications for governance (Keil and Young 2003; Todd 1998) and the organization of service provision (Reddy 2002). While these implications are not the central focus of our study, they do shape the organizational context of the workers we interviewed.

Amalgamation was opposed by all seven of the previously independent municipalities involved and many of their residents (Boudreau 2000), and contradicted earlier statements by Premier Harris and Municipal Affairs Minister Al Leach that decried a big government model for cities (Sancton 2000). Despite this, municipal restructuring came to be cast in terms of Premier Harris' "common sense revolution," a somewhat vague term that referred to less government and promised to wring efficiencies from public sector institutions with the goal of making them more cost-effective (Downey and Williams 1998). Early on in the life of the new city, however, it appeared that restructuring had not yet resulted in the savings that had been projected (Sancton 2000), a finding that has also been reported in assessments of amalgamation in other jurisdictions (Kushner and Siegel 2005; McKay 2004; Vojnovic 1998).

Kipfer and Keil (2002) suggest that the municipal amalgamation in the Toronto area be seen as part of a process of capitalist urbanization that takes different forms under specific historical and geographical configurations. The competitive city is its most recent incarnation, one that builds on an "entrepreneurial" model of urban planning intent on attracting corporate investment on a global scale. This is done, in part, through municipal structures that endorse neoliberal governance principles and private sector approaches to public service provision (Kipfer and Keil

2002). Public documents outlining the postamalgamation progress-to-date clearly indicated the application of NPM principles and practices through “fiscal responsibility” in budgeting practices, increased flexibility in service provision through contracting out, and more labour discipline (Garrett 1999, 2001). This “new corporate culture” was entirely congruous with the political structures and processes that fostered a competitive city.

In sum, the provincial government’s amalgamation legislation ushered in a period of massive restructuring of local government in the Toronto region. The new municipality’s response to these pressures reflects an underlying belief that private sector management principles and practices can do a better job of delivering public services than the “old way of doing things.” The resulting directives to downsize through staff cuts and redefine service delivery processes had clear implications for working conditions and relationships, including job loss and insecurity, work intensification, and increased surveillance as the implementation of individual performance measures in the context of “best practices” gathered momentum in the “new corporate culture” of this organizational field.

METHODS

Data Collection

We conducted a multimethod study (survey and in-depth interviews) in 2004 and 2005 to determine the nature of workers’ experiences in the postamalgamation workplace. The study was supported by two unions, one representing “inside” employees (the majority of whom were white collar and female) and the other representing “outside” employees (the majority of whom were blue collar and male). Because the union membership lists are confidential, union officials agreed to handle survey sample selection and data collection, following our instructions. At the end of the self-administered survey, respondents were invited to include their name and contact information if they wished to consider participating in a follow-up interview. In total, 902 workers completed the survey (a 45 percent response rate), and 54 of them indicated their willingness to be contacted by the research team (McDonough et al. 2008).

A preliminary analysis of the survey data showed that negative work experiences and dissatisfaction with management were widespread, and these areas were selected for further exploration in the subsequent interviews. The findings presented in this paper are based on semistructured interviews conducted with 45 of the 54 workers who indicated in the survey that they were worn out, burned out, or emotionally exhausted (N=26), or who were experiencing problems with management and/or

job uncertainty (N=19). The interviews probed workers' responses to the survey items on labour-management relations, working conditions, morale, commitment, coping strategies, relationships with coworkers, health and well-being, and life outside work. Digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim, the interviews lasted from 40 minutes to more than 2 hours, averaging approximately 90 minutes in length.

Analysis

The overall question guiding the analysis was: *how do front-line workers respond to organizational restructuring in the context of their daily work activities?* The interview transcripts were analyzed in an iterative manner which involved multiple close readings of the transcripts in order to generate descriptive codes and themes that were grounded in the interviewees' responses and which were then applied back to the transcripts (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 1994). A key recurring theme that emerged through this process was the workers' frustration and inner conflict. However, these responses differed for manual labourers (most of whom were male) and professional employees (most of whom were female). Thus, we focused specifically on the distinct themes that characterized the responses of these two groups.

Although the study was not initially conducted with the theoretical concepts of habitus and hysteresis in mind, as data analysis proceeded, we found these notions to be particularly helpful in developing a theoretically informed interpretation of workers' practices in the context of restructuring and their classed and gendered nature. In the following section, we present two themes that illustrate how these groups of unionized public service workers responded to organizational restructuring. In the subsequent discussion, we interpret these themes theoretically in relation to Bourdieu's theory of practice, with specific attention to his concepts of habitus and hysteresis.

RESULTS

Both groups of employees talked about their problems with heavier workloads, excessive surveillance and control (e.g., increased scrutiny of sick time), and the ever-expanding responsibilities that intensified their work in the postamalgamation environment. They also consistently described management as uncaring, unresponsive, exclusionary, autocratic, ineffective, and incompetent. Particularly striking in their accounts was the framing of their working conditions and relationships with management as obstacles that interfered with their abilities to work in a manner

to which they had become accustomed. This left them feeling frustrated and conflicted.

We interpret these frustrations and internal struggles as embodied expressions of hysteresis or the mismatch between their public service habitus (i.e., the deeply held ways they had become disposed to being public servants) and what was required of them when their organizational field shifted in the context of amalgamation and restructuring. These internal struggles took two main forms that clustered, generally, around gender and occupational class. Many of the manual labourers mourned the loss of preamalgamation working conditions and relationships, and laid much of the blame for their losses on management. Some spoke about needing to disengage emotionally from their jobs and from their dedication to “the public.” The professionals in this study, mostly women in care work, were more likely to resolve the mismatch between their public service habitus and changes in the organization by working harder to keep up with the additional demands of their jobs. Most said they did so because they were responding to the needs of their constituents.

Loss and Mourning among Male Labourers

When speaking about recent changes to their workplace, many of the manual labourers reminisced about how things used to be on the job. This frequent, nostalgic recall of the “good old days” suggested that these workers were remembering former ways of being a (good) worker and mourning the loss of a system of working that had given rise to such dispositions. A specific form of loss expressed by this group of workers was that they no longer felt they were recognized by their managers as individuals. Some linked this development to frequent changes in management during the restructuring process. Charlie, a millwright, placed importance on his manager knowing him by name, and blamed the loss of this personal relationship on the new management regime and its business ethic:

...there were other directors back in the old days, you could actually talk to them. They knew you by name. We've gone through restructuring programs over the last 10 years, right? They've wanted to run it like a business, you know? They wanna cut money, save money.

This loss of personal recognition by management had implications for workers' experiences of social belonging and collective identity. Bob, a handyworker, described how his sense of belonging was threatened by changes in supervisors and impersonal and uncaring management practices:

I always felt like everybody knew my name. Like, I felt like I belonged, like I was part of something. Now I'm strictly a number. Even within the small group, you know? Because management's changed so much. You know, like, the supervisors, they couldn't care less. They're just worrying about themselves. Everybody's just worried about themselves.

Related to this loss of personal recognition and social belonging, manual workers identified a loss of pride in their work when their commitment to public service was no longer recognized by supervisors and managers. For Alan, a driver-loader, the respect and appreciation he felt he had received in return for the physical sacrifices he made on the job contributed to his former sense of pride as a public servant:

... for three years I was given free rein to do the operation, to do what I thought was best, and it felt great, even though it was a really, really tough job. I'd wake up in the morning and my back would be killing me, but I felt like I was appreciated.

In the context of restructuring, the physical sacrifices that reflected Alan's public service habitus were neither recognized nor rewarded.

This tension between one's public service habitus and the new regime was also suggested by Bob, a handyworker, who felt management's lack of appreciation of front-line workers' willingness to "go above and beyond the call of duty." He framed such commitment in terms of the years he had made himself available to the city on an on-call basis in order to respond to emergencies:

That was a slap in the face to me as well, just realizing that we're that inconsequential to our employer. You know, thanks very much for being on call for free for the last 10 years. We're really happy that the sewage never made it in the lake, but, 'bye' ... it made me realize that I really need to make this conscious effort to separate myself from my work even more.

As suggested by the above excerpt, Bob experienced management's lack of gratitude and recognition of his steadfastness as a physical affront — a "slap in the face" — to which he responded by expressing the need to more consciously "separate" himself from his work. However, this led to an inner struggle that found him "fighting" his natural instinct to be a conscientious worker.

For some of the outside workers, loss was related to the ways in which restructuring changed the nature and organization of their work tasks. For Marty, the expansion of his geographical area of responsibil-

ity meant that he spent more time driving and less time doing work that he considered meaningful and enjoyable. Having a larger area to cover made it more difficult to see the fruits of his labours and to “take care of” and pride in his everyday work. Like Bob, Marty expressed frustration adapting his dispositions — that is, reorienting his public service habitus — to align with the revised requirements of the job:

...[it has been] very frustrating since this amalgamation. Times are not as happy at work as they used to be. Nobody goes to work to be happy, but it was one of my secret little bonuses I always enjoyed because I had a good day, generally got a couple of good guys doing the job, taking care of my area and the guys that I worked with had the same kind of pride and thoughts as I did on how to take care of your area and it was good and now it doesn't matter.... I pride myself in my work and it's been very hard for me to adopt somewhat of a new attitude. I still take pride in the work that I do but it's just not the same.

To summarize, among the manual labourers, organizational changes were embodied as internal struggles that were expressed as loss — loss of a former way of being a public service worker wherein dedication and contribution to public service work were valued and recognized by management. Organizational changes made it increasingly difficult for these employees to maintain a sense of commitment to, and thus pride in, their work. In the next section, we turn to our interviews with female professionals in order to illustrate the particular character of their inner struggles in the wake of organizational change.

Working Harder than Ever among Female Professionals

In contrast to the male labourers, the nurses, librarians, and caseworkers conveyed their frustration with restructuring in terms of their problems providing services to their clients. Many stressed that they were working harder than ever to meet their clients' needs. Particularly striking were their references to the conflicts they felt between management goals and their duty to conduct their work in a way that was consistent with their professional training, their personal beliefs, and, for some, a broader social or political mission. Barbara, a welfare caseworker, described this conflict as a constant struggle and an enduring feature of her working life:

I find the hardest part of this job is that they hire you as a Social Worker, and then they just want you to look at the financial.... [I]t's a real dichotomy ... because there's your educational training concerns and human being concerns versus the financial end of things... that's basically what a worker's up against daily.

Similarly, Sarah's frustration with management directives that were incompatible with her view of her work is evident in the following passage which reaches deeply into her reasons for *being* a children's librarian:

The reason I come to work does not have anything to do with what the Library wants me to do. I have my own philosophy of what it is to be a Children's Librarian. I am encouraging children to love to read. The frustrating part now is, since amalgamation ... now that we're a great big bureaucratic machine, the powers that be are so far removed from service delivery that it seems all that they have to go by are the statistics that get spit out of the computer.

These employees tended to respond to the conflict between their personal commitment and new management expectations by working harder. Some, like Sarah, refused to give up those parts of their work that meshed with their personal philosophies. In order to maintain the fit between her personal philosophy and her job as a public servant in the context of new management directives, Sarah reframed the meaningful parts of her work as her "hobby" and "volunteer work." While this reframing may have helped her maintain the integrity of her professional habitus, it also meant taking on "extra hours" as she incorporated the important parts of her work into her own personal time and space:

It's become my hobby and my volunteer work, and that's how I don't mind putting in all the extra hours. I spend my own time at home on parts of the Librarianship that have to do with bringing children and books together for a love of reading, for the growth of the child, so that they will grow up to be positively contributing members of society. I'm not willing to spend my own time learning how to use a database.

In contrast to the responses of the male manual labourers who identified the need to withdraw their commitment, nurses and caseworkers expressed a continued willingness to go the extra mile to provide care in a way that was consistent with their views of good public service. We suggest that their efforts to maintain their public service habitus were shaped, in part, by their socialization in "helping" professions. For example, when asked how she continued to do her work in the face of barriers, Marcia responded that her commitment is part and parcel of "becoming a nurse."

I think it goes back to a commitment to the job and the role, and the working with families. And I think from a nursing perspective, becoming a nurse, it becomes part of who you are. When it's sort

of intrinsic to who you are and what you do, even though there's all these external stress factors and uncertainties, when you're there and you're working with a family, that's key at the time. And I think, not just myself, but the majority of us in the job that we do with the city, we sacrifice ourselves for the job.

Indeed, Marcia's talk of maintaining commitment and quality of services through self-sacrifice provides a stark contrast to the responses of some of the manual labourers who said that they were attempting to be less committed to their work or, as Bob put it, to be "less conscientious."

Related to their professional socialization (*habitus*), and adding to the inner conflict of these professional employees, was their proximity to their clients. These front-line public servants were acutely aware of the immediacy of their clients' often urgent needs, and this contributed to their sense of frustration as they tried — often with great difficulty — to meet these needs. Many described the constant frustration of being over-worked and always behind schedule because of under-staffing, and having to cut corners to get work done. As Ann, a public health nurse, said, taking care of clients under such conditions took a personal toll.

The clinic I was working in has too many patients for the number of nurses. So the workload is always more than you can handle; you're turning people away at the front door.... But you have no choice because you *can't*.... And that is really hard.

Patricia, a social worker, also identified the immediacy of her clients' needs as shaping her response to the intensification of work after amalgamation. At the time of the interview, her active caseload had increased by 30 percent and her job duties had expanded to include employment counseling. This shift, and the subsequent reduced amount of time she had to spend with her clients, added to her frustration with her work which, as she suggests, emanated from the disparity between management directives and what she *wanted* to do:

... now they want you to do so much employment counselling which is, I actually really like that, but I don't have the time. I sit with that person for an hour and a half and I go back to my desk and I have 12 phone calls ... and then the paperwork is overwhelming. The amount of paper has quadrupled since we had a computer [system].... It's so frustrating to have so little time to actually spend with each individual client.

The effects of organizational restructuring on these workers' experiences of inner conflict or turmoil were particularly evident among those who worked with vulnerable and marginalized populations. Some of the

welfare caseworkers described extreme levels of stress and frustration in relation to their roles as witnesses to the unending economic insecurities and sufferings of their clients. In this regard, they described their work as essential to their clients' basic survival needs (e.g., food and housing). This ongoing frustration resulted in an emotional breakdown for Barbara, a welfare caseworker who had been with the city for 23 years. She described her increasing difficulty responding to the immediate concerns of her clients and, thus, helping them to secure the necessities of daily life:

... another part of my personal psyche is, if you are depending on me for a cheque ... I have to have the right actual shelter for you, I have to have all your information. I have to make sure that I have your children on your file with you. So, you're inundated daily with mail, as well as phone calls. This is as well as having to interview to update the whole file, every 3 months. Six months for single moms, every 3 months for employable people. So, I think, well, part of my emotional downfall was I just felt that everything was too immediate.... To do as much as you can immediately is not easy. I did it. I used to come in early and leave late. And then I found out that they thought I was incompetent.

Like Sarah, the librarian, Barbara put in extra time to keep up with her workload. However, as she suggested, doing so was neither valued nor rewarded by management in the new regime. Furthermore, as she suggests above, this intensified workload and her responses to it took a serious toll on her mental health.

In sum, for both female professionals and male labourers, new management directives that resulted from restructuring and reflected NPM principles contradicted their public service habitus, that is, their deeply rooted dispositions about how to be "good" public servants. However, while the responses of the male workers emphasized loss — of pride in their work, of management recognition of their efforts and, sometimes, of commitment — the female professionals responded by working harder to continue to provide services to their clients/constituents in ways that upheld their personal commitments and professional values.

DISCUSSION

This paper set out to explore and interpret the daily struggles of unionized public servants whose workplace was undergoing major change, with a particular focus on their responses to this change. A key theme that emerged from our interviews with front-line workers was their

frustration with their working conditions and relationships with management. We conceptualize the frustrations and inner turmoil of these employees as embodied expressions of hysteresis, that is, the dissonance between the predispositions they acquired and incorporated as public servants prior to restructuring (i.e., their public service habitus) and those required for success in the restructured organizational field. These frustrations and inner conflicts reflected the symbolic context of restructuring: the struggle to redefine governance and public services provision in the name of greater efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability (McDonough 2006). Creating the “mega-city” of Toronto ostensibly contributed to this goal, as did the NPM practices that accompanied it. This regime change invoked new conditions for achieving success in the organization — for being a “good” public servant. As we have argued elsewhere (McDonough 2006), organizational shifts imposed by NPM displace the “traditional” principle of the public good — the sacrificing of selfish interests, especially economic ones, for the good of the group — and favour the view that the public good is better served through market mechanisms (Bourdieu 1998). Indeed, insofar as NPM reflects a neo-liberal vision of public service provision and management, the front-line workers’ experiences of frustration can be viewed as embodied manifestations of political redefinitions of the public good.

Such discord has been reported in other studies of restructuring (Zipin and Brennan 2003), especially in the health care sector where providers describe a gap between managerial imperatives and their own views of “good” care provision (Bone 2002; Nowak and Bickley 2005). Similarly, reference to workers as “cultural carriers” of prereform organizational practices is evocative of the hysteresis effect (McIntosh and Broderick 1996). These earlier studies did not interpret workers’ experiences of organizational change in terms of hysteresis, but doing so allows us to more fully grasp their cultural *and* structural character. Although our study did not specifically set out to explore them, the gendered, occupational class dimensions of hysteresis highlight its structured nature. As we described, many of the male manual workers mourned the loss of preamalgamation working conditions and relationships, and some made a conscious effort to adopt ways of *not* being “good” public servants through emotional disengagement from their jobs. In the context of the new regime, the physical hardships and commitment to public service that constituted part of their public service habitus were increasingly difficult to justify as changes to management and work organization resulted in less recognition of these workers’ sacrifices. In contrast, the female professionals attempted to resolve the mismatch between their public service habitus and changing organizational conditions by inten-

sifying their labour in order to preserve the integrity of their professional identities and personal philosophies.

This social patterning of position-takings can be understood in relation to the generative structure of practice, that is, to the habitus. While both groups of unionized workers were positioned in the dominated sector of the organization (i.e., they were not management), their differential responses to change may be understood partly in relation to their past experiences in other fields (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008). Of particular relevance is that the librarians, nurses, and caseworkers shared particular social conditions and conditionings by virtue of their training in feminized professions influenced by discourses about women's "natural" proclivity to care for others. We interpret their working harder than ever to provide services as an expression of a professional habitus that predisposed them to respond in this way, that is, as dedicated practitioners attending to the immediate needs of their clients. Like the female teacher educators in Murray's (2006) study of organizational change, they struggled to practice a form of professionalism that reflected and reproduced traditional constructions of women in these occupational groups as caring and nurturing. Furthermore, the immediacy of their clients' needs, and the proximity of these workers to their clients, intensified their internal struggles as they strove to uphold their professional habitus in the face of staff cutbacks and heavier workloads. Lacking a professional habitus and the cultural and symbolic capital that such a disposition embodies, manual labourers were left making insistent appeals to the traditional vision of the public good. This they accomplished through nostalgic accounts of loss that cast new work structures and processes as inferior to, or even violating, the integrity of those to which they were accustomed.

In situating workers' responses to restructuring as the product of the relationship between habitus and the organization as a field, this paper builds on sociological theory and research on workplace restructuring by emphasizing the links between agency and structure. The concept of habitus recognizes the creative and practical nature of position-takings, as front-line service providers struggle with the mismatch between their habitus shaped by past fields and their changing social world. This indeterminacy can be seen in the diversity of the practices of these two groups of employees. At the same time, our theoretical frame and analysis suggest that workers' symbolically meaningful practices were guided by the "constraints and solicitations" (Wacquant 2005:318) of the structured organizational space. In other words, differences in practices or position-takings must be interpreted in light of the structural positions from whence they emerge. This is consistent with the argument that "the

analysis of interactions alone ... can never suffice to reveal the larger framework of power relations that expresses itself within such interactions — and that helps to frame them in the first place” (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008:22).

From a Bourdieusian perspective, the strategies deployed by workers confronting a shifting context reflect differences in the types of capital they possessed and, thus, in their taken-for-granted evaluations of what was possible (or not) under changing conditions. Our findings suggest that manual labourers drew on the symbolic capital of traditional public service, something they perceived to be eroding, while librarians, nurses, and case workers appeared to mobilize additional cultural and symbolic capital connected with their respective professions. Although Bourdieu (1996) alludes to such differences in his recognition that only some groups are appropriately positioned to take advantage of new opportunities in a changing field, the idea that the experience of hysteresis will vary according to structural position has, to our knowledge, not yet been empirically investigated. Our findings are suggestive of the gendered, class-based character of habitus (McNay 1999; Reay 1997; Skeggs 1997). While our study was not specifically designed to examine the notion of a “gendered habitus” in the work setting, it remains a worthy goal for future research (McLeod 2005).

Finally, our use of the notion of hysteresis in the context of NPM-inspired organizational change suggests that workers’ frustrations can be understood as embodied responses of inner conflict that are produced when the expectations endorsed by NPM directives disrupt and challenge workers’ prior dispositions. Such experiences took a serious toll on the health and well-being of some, a stark reminder of the suffering that can be generated by a “destabilized habitus, torn by contradiction and internal division” (Bourdieu 2000:160). Having said this, Bourdieu also suggests that periods of mismatch present opportunities to resist the managerial perspective that, in the language of efficiency, effectiveness and performance assessment promote a commodified public good (McDonough 2006). Indeed, into the “instant of hesitation” (Bourdieu 2000:162) when habitus is out of phase with changing field conditions, comes the possibility of subversive symbolic action aimed at “legitimizing and ratifying senses of unease and diffused discontents” (Bourdieu 2000:235). By making public and explicit a vision of public service as privileging the public good over private (selfish) interests, these city workers — and their unions — present a potent symbolic force against the penetration of economic market logic into all fields (Bourdieu 1998:101).

The contributions of this study must be considered in light of its limitations. Key here is that our focus on the City of Toronto as a workplace does not do justice to the organization as a field. Doing so would be a much larger undertaking — exploring the structure of the field by determining the key figures and groups in the organization, the kinds of relevant capital they possess, and the ways in which they deploy such capital in the struggle over a dominant principle of the public good (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008:22). For example, the position-takings of senior management are important to consider because “from the point of view of an organization’s overall behaviour and trajectory, the most decisive position-takings are likely to take place not in the secretary’s cubicle but in the executive suite itself” (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008:28). Unions also occupy key structural positions within the organization. Although our study provides some insight into the position-takings of some of their members, examining those of the unions and their leadership is essential for a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of struggle in the organization and its bearing on the issue of defining the public good in the context of NPM and neoliberalism, more broadly.

Also relevant to better understanding the dynamics of change in this municipal bureaucracy is the observation that an organization-as-field itself exists within a field of organizations (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008). Thus, the position-takings of other levels of the Canadian state (i.e., the provincial and federal governments) on public management reform, for example, would surely be relevant to the dynamics of conflict — and change — at our study site. Indeed, delineating the configuration of relationships that constitute the interorganizational bureaucratic field remains a formidable, if essential, task for future research on public sector restructuring. Returning to our more modest aims, this paper illustrates that Bourdieu’s theory of practice and the concept of hysteresis provide a useful framework for understanding unionized municipal workers’ responses to change in the context of NPM, one which accommodates a complex understanding of the stratified and differentiated nature of practice and its embodied character.

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