

Collective Bargaining and the Gender Pay Gap in the Printing Industry

Tricia Dawson*

This paper considers the effect of collective bargaining on the gender pay gap in the printing industry. This sector was subject to multi-employer bargaining for around 90 years, until 2010. The article analyses gendered collective bargaining processes through the mechanism of symbolic power, that is, the power of interpretation and definition, and utilizes Walton and McKersie's seminal work on bargaining behaviour to understand the processes that have prevented the closing of the pay gap. It finds that symbolic power operates within the sub-processes of attitudinal structuring and intra-organizational bargaining to de-legitimize women's role in equal pay bargaining, alongside distributive bargaining tactics that preclude equal pay bargaining, thereby creating the impression that women are irrelevant to bargaining processes and ensuring relative invisibility for issues of importance to equality bargaining.

Keywords: gender pay gap, collective bargaining, power

Introduction

This paper addresses the issue of how gendered pay inequality has survived in the printing industry, when technological change might have been expected to challenge existing pay structures. It asks why the pay gap has remained so wide in the printing industry when it has narrowed in other sectors; and whether collective bargaining processes contributed to addressing pay equity. The paper uses the concepts of symbolic power and invisibility to uncover the mechanisms responsible for the continuance of the pay gap. Qualitative analysis is the primary research method, while quantitative analysis provides a framework for the discussion of pay outcomes and the industry context.

The subject of this study was the general printing industry. This sector still employs 140,000 people in 10,500 companies in Britain and is the fifth largest print producer in the world (British Printing Industries Federation, 2010). This research complements Cockburn's (1983) study, which provided insight into the newspaper industry. However, that industry excluded women in production areas, while this study was designed to consider how gender relations are maintained where exclusion has not been possible. It reviews the period from around 1980 to 2010. The industry has greatly reduced in size since the late 1990s and, while maintaining a significant union presence, has developed pockets of non-unionism. The union members involved in this research were from the Graphical, Paper and Media Union (GPMU), which subsequently merged with Amicus in 2004 and then UNITE in 2007. The employers were members of the British Printing Industries Federation (BPIF). The national agreement between these two bodies had been in place since 1919 (Howe, 1950, pp. 63, 69) and latterly was adapted into a partnership agreement (BPIF/Amicus GPM Sector Partnership Agreement and Code of Practice, 2005), before being abandoned in 2010.

Address for correspondence: *Keele Management School, Keele University, Keele, Staffs ST5 5BG, UK; e-mail: p.a.m.dawson@keele.ac.uk

This paper argues that, despite changes in women's representation in national bargaining, equality bargaining is marginalized through the effects of gendered power relations and the relative invisibility of issues of specific interest to women. A coincidence of interest, providing cheap labour for employers and maintaining status and higher pay for male workers, provided a superficial motivation for retaining traditional pay processes but it is argued here that those processes have been detrimental to union organization. The possession of symbolic power, which is discussed below, enabled hegemonic groups to dominate the definition of appropriate bargaining issues and to interpret the acceptable approach to negotiations. The result was the reinforcement of the gender pay gap when-ever women mobilized to challenge it. The mechanisms that supported these processes are discussed below.

Power and pay processes

There are a variety of ways of explaining the gender pay gap. This paper considers the effect of gendered access to power resources, specifically symbolic power, on pay equality. These concepts are explored below.

Bargaining may occur at a number of levels: national, regional, enterprise or plant. Multi-employer (national) bargaining grew to the 1960s but thereafter declined so that by 2011 only 6 per cent of private sector workplaces utilized this method (van Wanrooy *et al.*, 2012, p. 22), those agreements that continued in existence probably no more than 'safety nets' (Gospel and Druker, 1998, p. 251).

Walton and McKersie's seminal work on behaviour in labour negotiations (1965) forms the core of our understanding of collective bargaining processes. Their aim was to analyse

labor negotiations as an example of *social negotiations*, by which we mean the deliberate interaction of two or more complex social units which are attempting to define or redefine the terms of their interdependence. (Walton and McKersie, 1965, p. 3)

They developed a model comprising four sub-processes and a synthesis that demonstrated the complexity of negotiations. These sub-processes comprised distributive bargaining (a zero sum game, where if one side gains the other loses); integrative bargaining (a problem-solving approach that has potential for gain on both sides); attitudinal structuring (the development of the desired relationship patterns between negotiators); and intra-organizational bargaining (negotiators' tactics for balancing the conflicting interests within their constituencies without compromising the ability to reach agreement with their opponents). Their analysis was based on manufacturing industry and sought to identify the range and effect of tactics used in the interaction of these sub-processes.

Given the period in which it was produced, it is not surprising that it does not consider the effects of gender on bargaining behaviour and outcomes. However, the tactics identified can be useful in uncovering gendered pay processes. For instance, the tactic of letting items fall off the agenda (Walton and McKersie, 1965, pp. 334–5) can serve gendered interests in averting the negotiation of equal pay; the informal contact (Walton and McKersie, 1965, pp. 63, 312) between male negotiators on both sides may promote a shared understanding of the industry and thus tend towards a shared interpretation of bargaining priorities (attitudinal structuring). Furthermore, a gendered reading of intra-organizational bargaining raises questions about how internal conflict over gender pay differentials might be managed. Sub-processes also interact. For instance, distributive bargaining may support the mutual gains of integrative bargaining (Findlay *et al.*, 2009). In this regard, equality bargaining can be potentially integrative in preventing recourse to law, although employers face cost implications (distributive effects) from non-discrimination too. Other permutations are also possible.

Recent research has confirmed that equality bargaining does take place quite widely, although it is much less apparent in manufacturing industry beyond procedural agreements (Colling and Dickens, 2001; Heery, 2006). This contradicts the findings in the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS 2004), which found only 5 per cent of workplaces had negotiations on equality (Walsh, 2007, pp. 305–6). Even where women officers were involved, equality bargaining was only slightly more

visible (Heery, 2006, p. 533). Furthermore, employers may resort to de-legitimizing equality bargaining, labelling it 'social issues' (Acker, 1998). It is suggested here that an analysis of power relations may explain the limitations of equality bargaining.

It would be hard to understand the dynamics of the employment relationship without an appreciation of the concept of power (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004). In particular, Kelly (1998) draws attention to the importance of power for mobilization in pursuit of employee interests. He identifies a lack of research into the operation of power as a weakness for industrial relations research (1998, p. 9).

Lukes (2005) provides a framework for understanding the use of power. The first, coercive power is a crude form that is easily identifiable from the behaviour of the protagonists. However, the second and third dimensions are progressively less easily observed. The second dimension involves the mobilization of bias through manipulating the 'rules of the game' and through non-decisions that may, for instance, act to sabotage the implementation of previous decisions (Lukes, 2005, p. 23). The third dimension renders decision-making all but invisible, thereby averting opposition and preventing grievances being raised. As a result, power relations are embedded and potential challenges stifled because it appears there is no alternative to the existing situation (Lukes, 2005, p. 28).

Power resources are the mechanism for enacting power and there have been many attempts to identify the bases of power (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963; French and Raven, 1960; Hickson *et al.*, 1971), each identifying new dimensions. However, Bradley (1999) produced a particularly useful model for identifying gendered power relations that included nine power resources (pp. 34–6). Within this model, symbolic power is identified as providing the ability to control meanings, definitions and interpretations (Bradley, 1999, p. 35). Such a source of power cannot operate in isolation but, where other key power resources provide access to symbolic power, it becomes a mechanism for reinforcing existing asymmetrical power structures or, alternatively, challenging them. In this regard, Dawson (2010) identifies skill acquisition and gendered mobilization, that is, men's mobilization in defence of traditional bargaining practices, as mechanisms of technical, collective and sexual power. In contrast, she notes, women may resist through access to sexual and collective power resources, but rarely have access to technical power.

It is argued here that collective bargaining processes, as pursued by both employers and unions in general printing, operate through asymmetrical gendered power resources to stifle or prevent women challenging the gendered pay hierarchy. Consequently, while women themselves are no longer invisible, it has been possible to make their issues invisible in practice and construe women as irrelevant to bargaining processes, as will be demonstrated below.

The printing industry

General printing 'consists of a number of overlapping sub-sectors ... [including] magazine and periodical production, advertising literature, books, diaries and calendars, brochures, children's books, leaflets, business cards and stationery, printed labels, programmes and tickets and packaging, etc.' (Healy *et al.*, 2003, p. 551). Prior to the 1990s, the industry had also relied on a pre-entry closed shop, where workers were required to be union members before gaining employment in companies in which such union membership agreements existed. Even at the time of this research (2002), a combination of employer, union and official statistics indicated that union density in the sector was still over 60 per cent and employers claimed that around 70 per cent of employees were skilled. Women could be said to benefit from a secondary internal labour market as a result of the national agreement. This had the effect of raising their wages above what they would expect from other possible alternative employment (Craig *et al.*, 1984, pp. 9, 54) and sometimes provided limited training and promotion opportunities.

Women have been widely employed in printing since the middle of the nineteenth century (Bundock, 1958). They have tended to dominate the finishing/bindery work, with smaller numbers of men designated as skilled operating the larger machines. In pre-press areas, women made inroads during the 1980s, but this was short-lived in general printing as the customer increasingly produced

work that was virtually print-ready — reducing employment. Latterly, this work was further rationalized with computer-to-plate technology or digital printing (Healy *et al.*, 2003; Newsome, 2000). Conventional wisdom suggested that women would have greater access to the less physical jobs created by technological developments. However, this has not been the case, and technology tended to concentrate work in the skilled grade while removing the surplus labour in the semi- and unskilled grades. Consequently, occupational segregation remains unchanged, while the union has had an ambiguous role in delivering gender equality (Dawson, 2010, 2011).

In fact, it appears intensified global trade has increasingly removed printing jobs from the UK and the industry is now less a graphical sector than a sub-sector of the communications industry. Certainly, the employers' federation has embraced this approach as they indicate that:

print is a major part of the modern, digitally-based communications landscape, it is one of a number of channels in a multi-media world. Today more and more printing companies are delivering integrated marketing solutions to their clients that add value to their business by expertly combining print and electronic media to leverage up the impact of both. (British Printing Industries Federation, 2010)

Despite a move into the, apparently more feminized, communications sector, women's employment had been steady at about 33 per cent for several decades (*Labour Market Trends*, 2003; TUC, 1973), but between 1994 and 2004 official statistics suggest that about 50,000 women were removed from the industry (ONS, 1994–2004). Between the 1950s and 1990s, women's union membership also dropped from 44 per cent of the total (Gennard and Bain, 1995, p. 487) to 17 per cent, a figure that remained steady throughout the existence of the GPMU. Therefore the increase in women's representation in decision-making bodies during the 1990s occurred at a time when they no longer constituted a critical mass in the union (Dawson, 2010, p. 91). Improved representation was visible in the women's committee, the introduction of a biennial women's conference and in guaranteed proportional representation (GPR) for women on all decision-making bodies in the GPMU, all enshrined in the union's rule book. This meant that women were represented proportionately in all delegations and on committees/negotiating panels. In terms of pay negotiations, this generally meant only one woman on a negotiating panel. Nevertheless, the influence of GPR was largely hidden by the executive council's (EC) formal role in enacting policy. A greater focus on organizing also failed to increase equality bargaining, as the issues raised generally reflected traditional bargaining concerns.

Tasks were classified by the class system in the national agreement, which indicated the pay grade. Class 1 was 100 per cent of basic pay and included skilled workers preparing material for printing, operating printing machines and certain bindery equipment, and was almost entirely male, that is, they worked in skilled jobs across all departments; Class 2 was 92.5 per cent of basic pay and contained mostly printing machine assistants in the press room (mostly male) and some women bindery workers who received an enhanced rate (see below); Class 3 was 87.5 per cent of basic pay and it was mostly women bindery workers who received this rate. In this way the simple pay structure mirrored work organization (Craig *et al.*, 1984, p. 26). There was also a series of extra payments that had a considerable effect on boosting Class 1 pay but had minimal effect on Classes 2 and 3.

Alongside the three basic grades, there was also a minimum earnings guarantee (MEG). The aim was to ensure that anyone who worked a full 37.5-hour week would not receive less than Class 2 basic pay. Subsequently, a separate level for the MEG was negotiated (see 'Negotiating processes' below). The agreement also acted as a benchmark for non-union firms (Healy *et al.*, 2003; Roe, 2003, p. 97), although rates were not uniform across the country. The results of these bargaining processes are discussed under 'Pay outcomes' below.

Evidence reveals that the Equal Pay Act (1971) did narrow gender pay differentials, probably as the result of removing the 'women's rate'. However, Class 3 subsequently became the *de facto* women's grade and little further progress was evident, the gap in median weekly earnings for manual workers remaining at 32.5 per cent in 2001 (ONS, 2002). While current figures are not directly comparable,

some further narrowing is evident, indicating a pay gap for both manual and non-manual workers of 29 per cent in median weekly earnings (ONS, 2012).

Research design

An industrial relations approach informed this research, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, although the former predominated. Analysis was interpretative and grounded in empirical findings. For the quantitative element, a survey was conducted across the membership of the union (excluding Ireland, which had different collective bargaining arrangements) and its aim was to provide a 'snapshot' of baseline data. This survey was conducted in 2002. The paper utilizes information on collective bargaining arrangements, pay data and employee perceptions of pay outcomes derived from this survey, alongside official data on employment and pay in the sector. The latter has to be treated with caution, because as employment has fallen, the results have been based on ever-smaller samples, although it remains the best source of data available for both snap-shots and longitudinally.

Previous internal surveys of this union's membership received low response rates and union attempts to measure pay had been abandoned because of member reluctance to divulge such information; hence the modest aims for this element of the research. Consequently, a large sample of approximately 8000 questionnaires was distributed in equal numbers to male and female members and a response rate of 15.5 per cent was achieved. This was comparable to the response rate received in the only external survey with this reach in printing, conducted by researchers from Warwick University on a non-equality subject, which received an 18 per cent response on a larger distribution. This latter survey had used proportional sampling so only 17 per cent of the survey was distributed to women. The very low numbers of responses from women to that survey informed the judgement that, as the current survey had a particular need to gauge women's responses, a proportionate sample would not have provided usable results. In the event, almost equal numbers of men and women responded to the survey (595 women, 621 men).

Research access reflected the position of the researcher as an employee of the union (GPMU) at the time the research was conducted, providing excellent access and a richness to the data obtained. Participant observation is often conflated with ethnomethodology (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 426) and is recognized as requiring additional research beyond observing individuals in the research site. It also involves the exchange of roles 'between researcher as participant and participant as researcher' (Ledwith and Hansen, 2012, p. 308). In this case, the researcher was actively engaged through her work in the issues covered, holding the position of Equality Policy Adviser (EPA) since 1997, responsible for all equalities nationally, developing and implementing policies as well as representing and negotiating on behalf of members of these groups. As gender equality mechanisms had been in place since around 1980, this area still received the greatest attention and, as observed elsewhere (Briskin, 1999), women's structures were often the starting point for work on other equalities. The author had been working for the print unions since 1979.

Throughout her employment she supported the national negotiations for this agreement, writing submissions to the Federation on all bargaining issues, including equality, providing briefing documents for negotiators and, from 1997, negotiating equality issues. As such, she had an intimate knowledge of the processes and personnel on both sides of the negotiating table, which facilitated access for interviews. The absence of equal pay on the bargaining agenda was an explicit driver of this research, with the aim of creating change. It was unavoidably political and not without risk (Ledwith and Hansen, 2012, p. 308). Even though it was not intended to demonize men, as Ledwith and Hansen report on the experience of one contributor to their book (Ledwith and Hansen, 2012, p. 310), there is 'a frisson of anxiety' when anticipating how peers will receive the results. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that all women in the union would agree with the approach to interpretation here, particularly women from a different political tradition, even if their goals were similar. No gender-based research in this area has had such an approach, although other studies of general printing and collective bargaining have involved employees or representatives of the union as researchers (see, for instance, Roe, 2003; Telford, 2001).

Table 1: *Characteristics of employers interviewed*

Identifier	Sex	Company size	Location	Service in printing
Employer 1	Male	Federation	London/countrywide	20+ years
Employer 2	Male	Small	West Midlands	20+ years
Employer 3	Female	Multinational	Countrywide/international	Less than a year
Employer 4	Male	Small	South-east	20+ years
Employer 5	Male	Small-medium	East Midlands	20+ years

Table 2: *Characteristics of union officers interviewed*

Identifier	National Officer or Branch Officer	Male/ Female	Age range
Officer 1	National Officer	Male	50–60
Officer 2	National Officer	Male	40–50
Officer 3	National Officer	Female	50–60
Officer 4	Branch Officer	Female	40–50
Officer 5	Branch Officer	Male	50–60
Officer 6	Branch Officer	Male	50–60
Officer 7	Branch Officer	Female	40–50
Officer 8	National Officer	Female	60–65
Officer 9	National Officer	Male	50–60
Officer 10	National Officer	Male	50–60
Officer 11	Branch Officer	Male	40–50
Officer 12	Branch Officer	Male	50–60
Officer 13	National Officer	Male	50–60
Officer 14	National Officer	Male	60–65

Note: All the officers had service of at least 10 years, many, more than 20 years. Further details would breach confidentiality.

Roe found there were benefits to participant observation in that interviewees tended to be more comfortable with someone familiar with the industry (2003, p. 11). There was also no feeling (as Bell suggests, 1987, p. 73) that interviewees wished either to please the researcher or to be antagonistic; the researcher's position was known. Certainly, interviewees were forthcoming, appeared to be relaxed and seemed to welcome the ability to use 'shorthand', not having to explain terminology. The author was aware that where there is such familiarity, it is important to maintain a 'high degree of self-awareness' (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 440).

The main research instrument was semi-structured interviews and those of most relevance for this paper were conducted with four employers plus a representative of the employers' federation and 14 paid union officials, eight at national level and six branch officials. All officers interviewed were involved in negotiating the agreement nationally and/or implementing it locally. The main elements of the interviews relevant to collective bargaining were the interviewees' backgrounds in the industry, their views on the state of the company/industry and union management relations, especially in relation to equality bargaining and the future of the industry. Interviewees reflected on developments between 1980 and 2010, sometimes going further back to illustrate a point. Union members' views are reflected in the survey results on their perceptions of the outcomes of bargaining processes.

Tables 1 and 2 identify the characteristics of the interviewees. All the male officials and employers had at least 20 years' service, as had three of the women officials. The fourth woman had over ten

years' service at that time. The gender split was ten male officers and four female officers (one retired). The gender split for employers was four male and one female. The woman manager had only ten months' service in this sector, but had worked for manufacturing companies in other sectors prior to this.

Documentary evidence was also useful, including ballot papers, the national agreement, conference reports and the employers' yearbooks. It provided material to both confirm and expand on the interviewees' recollections of the period.

Collective bargaining in the printing industry

The analysis of bargaining processes in the sector is divided into pre-negotiation and bargaining processes. A final section considers the outcomes of these processes.

Pre-negotiation processes

There are two key factors contributing to the maintenance of gendered differentials in the preparation for national negotiations. They particularly relate to the enacting of attitudinal structuring and intra-organizational bargaining. Their effect is threefold: to de-legitimize both women officials' role in bargaining and issues of importance to women; to trivialize the union's greater focus on these issues; and to reify the coincidence of interest existing between employers and male trade unionists. It is not suggested that overt collusion was responsible, more that a long-established, shared, male homosociability determined what counted as important on the bargaining agenda and who was best qualified to pursue it. Moreover, the need to satisfy the majority groups in each party's constituency drove negotiators towards gendered tactics, privileging issues more advantageous to men. Symbolic power is implicated in determining the priority given to issues and the credibility of those negotiating them. Furthermore, it is symbolic power that is at the heart of the key negotiators' shared understandings of the industry, that is, how they interpret the printing industry, its labour and product markets.

Membership consultation was the first stage for both parties, a form of intra-organizational bargaining. The union had three sources of agenda items: branch meetings, normally male dominated; resolutions from union conference; and issues forwarded from the union's women's committee and conference, the key mechanisms of interim separatism (Colgan and Ledwith, 1996, p. 164). The employers held regional meetings with representatives from member companies and their industrial relations committee, to determine their agenda. However, as the union weakened and local bargaining reduced, pay became the only agenda item, thus, contrary to Gospel and Druker (1998, p. 251), the agreement became more important as the only source of pay increases.

Each party's negotiating panels would then prioritize issues and determine tactics. Both panels were predominately male. GPR for women in decision-making structures ensured a woman was included on the union's panel. Improved representation is 'considerably less threatening than ... transformational demands' (Briskin, 1999, p. 545) and the results, discussed below, demonstrate that the exercise of women's collective and sexual power resources was insufficient to ensure grading and its link to occupational segregation were on the agenda. They were restricted to largely procedural issues such as the implementation of legislation; for instance, the clause providing guidance on delivering equal pay, although crucial issues around parental rights and bullying were frequently on the agenda. Rarely would there be women on the employer's panel.

The men on both sides tended to come from time-served apprenticeship backgrounds. This is important as it begins the process of attitudinal structuring, generating a masculinized, shared understanding of how the industry operated. The male chief negotiators had been negotiating together since the 1980s and had met many times outside of negotiations, thus embedding their shared views of the industry. This was significant given the acknowledged (by both sides) standing

of the GPMU's general secretary as a tough, highly respected negotiator, or heroic leader (Briskin, 2011, pp. 514–15). It was this leader who was also seen as delivering GPR, as opposed to women winning it (Colgan and Ledwith, 2002, p. 171).

Walton and McKersie saw shared understandings as an important part of bargaining behaviour that may assist the 'crystallizing of the bargaining agenda' (1965, pp. 312, 314). This process was evident at the semi-formal pre-meeting that occurred before negotiations. Because this was where the prioritization of agenda items occurred, tacit signals were given about each party's parameters for negotiation and, thus, pre-conditioned expectations for formal negotiations. Subsequently, there was a report back to the panels and support staff. Unsurprisingly, pay was always the most important and was scheduled as the last item on the agenda. Although it is unlikely that equality issues were specifically denigrated in these discussions, their placement early on the agenda suggested that they would be disposed of quickly.

The effects of such male homosociability were apparent in the discourse of bargaining. On the union side, women officials struggled to develop credibility. As officer 1 (male) made clear, the lack of a production background 'has created some difficulties with other officers. There's been overt pressure on them to run the equality agenda ... [rather] than taking up industrial issues and political issues'. This highlights an apparent distinction between equality and industrial issues that suggests the former is of lesser importance. Conversely, employers designated equality issues as 'social' and not appropriate for collective bargaining. The combined effect was a powerful form of de-legitimization on two fronts. First, there was the union's de-legitimization of women as competent to handle bargaining and, second, both sides questioned the relevance of equality issues within bargaining. Lukes (2005, p. 28) recognizes that power can operate covertly to avert challenges to the status quo. Successfully avoiding equal pay as an agenda item through de-legitimization reveals power resources at work. This serves a coincidence of interest, providing an excuse for employers to maintain women's lower-paid position, thus cutting costs, while supporting higher pay and status for male print workers, supporting industrial peace. This process is completed with one further de-legitimization tactic. The employers' former chief negotiator, employer 1 (male), clearly interpreted the union's pursuit of equality issues symbolically (cynically?) as solely driven by the need to survive, rather than a principled stand, '[s]o employers are not surprised that most minority groups are on [the union's] list. The union is a business that needs to grow'.

These processes of de-legitimization, operating through symbolic power, undermined women's attempts to challenge the bargaining agenda and to prioritize equal pay issues, but protected the coincidence of interests between male negotiators and utilized hidden power to 'naturalize' the existing agenda. Hegemonic groups tend to dominate the bargaining agenda (Dickens, 1997, p. 287) and these processes provide examples of how such domination is maintained, despite challenges. The joint use of symbolic power produces smoother negotiations and embeds the apparent irrelevance of equality bargaining.

Negotiating processes

Equality bargaining is said to be less frequent in manufacturing industry (Heery, 2006, p. 531). While it was incorporated in national bargaining for many years in printing, it delivered only minimal gains for women, probably because the key issue of equal pay was never on the GPMU agenda, although the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades (SOGAT, a constituent member of the GPMU) did have some success in negotiating the removal of Class 3 in some of the larger companies during the 1980s (Roe, 2003, p. 153). Evidence from the survey for the current research indicated that it was the larger companies with over 100 employees who made this concession. Negotiations concentrated primarily on distributive bargaining that appeared to follow a struggle along traditional class lines, but which took a gendered form in practice, women's pay treated as a 'special' issue rather than as an industrial pay grievance.

The panels conducted negotiations. The employers' panel would consist of the full-time employed chief negotiator plus a small number of employer representatives from a spread of companies. The

union's panel consisted of the general secretary (chief negotiator) and deputy general secretary, four EC members and one or more paid national union officials to deal with particular issues. The equality adviser, or prior to her appointment, the woman official with responsibility for women's equality, would usually be there to supplement the panel for equality bargaining. Usually only a proportion of the union panel would go in to the negotiating room for each item, primarily chosen by the chief negotiator and generally accepted by the full panel. The equality adviser would support the deputy general secretary, but rarely the general secretary (the heroic leader), in sessions dealing with equality issues, and the woman EC member would also be part of this sub-panel. These processes were mostly formal but at crucial points there might be informal 'corridor' discussions between the chief negotiators for both sides, prior to formally reconvening.

The employers' goal was to deliver greater efficiency and productivity in increasingly competitive product markets. Their main tactic was to require any concessions to the union to be self-financing, labelled full-cost recovery (FCR). This took on a gendered dimension in the successful attempt to widen differentials that was part of the *quid pro quo* for restoring the national agreement after the breakdown in relationships during the 1993 national dispute (GPMU, 1995, p. 9; Roe, 2003, p. 242). It was explained above that the agreement consisted of three grades, linked to work organization (Classes 1, 2 and 3) with the middle grade operating as an MEG. The latter, in practice, primarily benefited women, so the employer demand in 1994 that the MEG be set at a new rate between Classes 2 and 3 was bound to adversely affect gender pay differentials. As employer 1 explained,

We wanted to spend money on the skilled rather than the unskilled. For the union this was a problem. The steps we took to uncouple the MEG and class 2 were cautious. We hoped that over time it would widen out.

With a workforce that was 70 per cent skilled, employers' attention focused on cost savings at the lower end and they began their offensive in 1992 (Roe, 2003, pp. 190–1). The effect was to weaken the limited benefits that came from the introduction of the Equal Pay Act in the mid-1970s. Officer 4 (female) saw this as 'a backward step because it reintroduced class 4'. Its justification was based on an erroneous comparison with women workers in other manufacturing sectors (Dawson, 2011, p. 75). It also demonstrates the effects of the shared understandings between negotiators. While union negotiators might recognize the detrimental effects of widening differentials, there was little resistance, partly reflecting the intra-organizational concerns with the majority group's interests but also the underlying assumption (shared with employers) that differentials were too narrow.

The union approach was to continue the same tactics it had always used, wage leadership. Cockburn explains this as focusing on the highest paid in order to pull up the weak (1983, p. 210). Given that the agreement operated on set percentages, as explained above, this may seem sensible. But this could only work when skill (technical power) provided a strong bargaining position. In reality, this tactic was failing, but no alternative emerged. Alongside this was an embedded view that there was no need to challenge the existing valuation of women's work. Officer 9 exemplifies this approach, as he said, 'my own view is not so much that there is such a huge need for improving women's rates but a need to move [them] into better paid jobs'. Instead, as Dawson found (2011, p. 76), there was little chance of movement between grades because technology increasingly concentrated work in the hands of Class 1, at the expense of jobs for Classes 2 and 3, further isolating the remaining women.

Walton and McKersie noticed that employers' intransigence could make an issue appear too hard to achieve, providing a reason for failure (1965, p. 325). This could coincide with two other tactics: allowing items to drop off the agenda or conceding what was already possessed (Walton and McKersie, 1965, pp. 334–5). Such was the effect of the employers' 'stonewalling' over equality bargaining. So, although equality bargaining did take place, employer pressure would either lead to these items dropping off the agenda early or to the acceptance of clauses re-asserting legal rights. The latter may be seen as examples of non-decision-making (Lukes, 2005, p. 23) because they were not actively implemented, relying on women to raise discrimination issues first, as local officials admitted in interview.

Such implementation was largely the responsibility of local officials. Interviews with union officials garnered widespread endorsement that the agreement was not properly policed at local level. There was only minimal evidence of equality bargaining at local level; a point highlighted in employers' interviews, where most indicated that they had never been approached on such matters. This contradicts earlier research, which suggested that local bargaining could be good for the low paid (Craig *et al.*, 1984, p. 69), but tends to support Rubery and Fagan's concerns that MEB may reinforce gender differentials (1995, p. 229). However, this must be seen in the context of declining second tier, that is, local supplementary bargaining (Healy *et al.*, 2003, p. 554). Consequently, women saw few benefits from local bargaining, which continued to be reactive and contain little concerning equality (Colling and Dickens, 1989; Heery and Kelly, 1989).

Women officers had little influence on bargaining because they were so few in number and the existing culture diverted their attention from equality issues unless they were very determined to retain it. Two comments from women officers illustrate this point. Officer 3 was worried that she had lost focus on equality since achieving national office and was 'doing the job like a man ... not hunting for it [equality issues] specifically'. Conversely, officer 4 was concerned that women had to remain vigilant because male officers 'don't look for it [discrimination] — they assume everything's right and you've got to look beyond the norm.... Don't assume that companies do what they say they are doing. Male officers tend to accept what they are told.' The frustration evident in these comments arose from the knowledge that if they did not raise these issues, no one would; they could not rely on male officials to spot workplace discrimination. Interim separatism also failed here because, for a time, there was an edict that the women's committee could not discuss the national agreement, although this was later rescinded (Colgan and Ledwith, 2002, p. 172).

Women's influence remained limited at the pre-negotiation stage and was compounded in negotiating processes. Symbolic power available to employers and male union officials concentrated attention on the traditional class struggle, preventing gender solidarity as employer advantage increased; women's issues became invisible, not literally but in practice, through processes that treated them as marginal to this greater struggle.

Pay outcomes

The results of these processes can be seen in the extent of the differentials identified in evidence from the survey conducted for this research and in official statistics. Both these sources of data should, however, be treated with care for reasons explained under 'Research design', above. However, these two sources provide the best data available for the period under discussion.

Table 3 combines the results of two questions. As it was already clear that the national agreement was in decline at the point of the research, a second option was presented in the survey to allow those not following the agreement to indicate where they believed they would fall in their company's pay structure.

Women were concentrated in the lowest grades even when they were placed in a different grading structure. The 24 per cent of women in Class 2 probably reflected SOGAT's earlier success, mentioned above. This indicates that SOGAT did undertake equality bargaining and this probably reflected the fact that women's membership was proportionately much higher than in the GPMU, providing an opportunity for women to more effectively utilize sexual and collective power to pursue their interests. Such power was exemplified in delivery of a female general secretary, Brenda Dean, to help realize their aims, but who did not survive the later amalgamation (Dawson, 2010). Craig *et al.* suggest Class 2 re-classification made little real difference to women's earnings (1984, p. 50), probably because it would still have provided little access to extra payments. The importance of these can be seen in Table 4.

Women benefited less from this range of 'extras' than did men (with the interesting and notable exception of performance related pay). Healy *et al.* indicate that the type of machine operated was the most important factor in determining pay (2003, p. 554). Women rarely operated machines that accrued such payments. This could be construed as another strand of symbolic power, defining which machines, and implicitly, jobs should be designated skilled enough to receive extra payments.

Table 3: National agreement grades by sex and notional indication for those not following the agreement

Pay grade	Women (%)	Men (%)
Class 1	15.9	60.1
Class 2	23.6	8.9
Class 3	16.1	3.2
Near top	2.9	6.2
Middle	11.5	10.6
Near bottom	13.9	5.9
Non-response	16.1	5.1
Total	100	100

Source: Survey of GPMU members 2002 (N = 1289).

Table 4: Extra payments

	Non-response (%)	Machine extras (%)	Bonus pay (%)	Merit money (%)	Shift pay (%)	Overtime (%)	House extras (%)	Sick pay (%)	Holiday pay (%)	Call money (%)	PRP (%)
Male	4.0	29.8	7.4	5.5	61.2	74.2	12.9	58.3	76.8	20.3	1.4
Female	10.9	12.4	7.9	2.0	32.9	53.6	4.2	51.4	69.4	9.6	2.9

Source: Survey of GPMU members 2002 (N = 1216).

Survey data on gross pay revealed that in the £200 per week or less pay band, 15.7 per cent of women but only 0.8 per cent of men were represented, while the over £500 per week category contained 28.2 per cent of men and 3.5 per cent of women. Official data reveal the trends subsequent to the survey for this research. In 2004, weekly gross median earnings in the printing trades indicated a gender pay gap of 24.5 per cent, which increased to 29 per cent in 2012. This compares with a national gender pay gap of 9.6 per cent (ONS, 2012), demonstrating the continued need to understand pay mechanisms in this industry.

Finally, the weakness of the wage leadership approach can be seen in the failure of traditional tactics to satisfy members generally. When asked in the survey whether they were satisfied with their pay, 51 per cent of men and 59 per cent of women indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were. This was confirmed with a further question asking if they thought their pay was fair, resulting in 51 per cent of men and 58 per cent of women saying they disagreed or strongly disagreed that it was, unsurprising given that the level of these settlements was rarely above inflation in later years (GPMU ballot papers, 1991 onwards). It is apparent that these findings suggested considerable discontent with collective bargaining and presaged the abandonment of the agreement eight years later following the financial crash.

Conclusions

This research has aimed to establish the extent to which collective bargaining helped or hindered the achievement of equal pay in the printing industry. It drew on interviews with key players, reflecting

on the period 1980–2002 with documentary evidence bringing the story up to 2010. Baseline survey data for 2002 provided a checkpoint on developments.

The picture presented is a mixed one. The evidence of this research uncovers the less obvious mechanisms of power that hinder pay equality. Starting with the preparations for negotiations, it is clear that de-legitimization serves to exclude issues from the bargaining agenda or, where this cannot be avoided, frames them as something that can be dispensed with quickly. This benefits employers who do not need to concern themselves with questions of equal pay. Male union officials benefit by maintaining the focus on the majority (male) group for intra-organizational bargaining purposes; it prioritizes an agenda predicated on traditional lines of class struggle, women's concerns seen as a diversion from these complementary male interests. Male homosociability and the trade union's heroic leader, embedding a muscular approach to negotiating, both dominate agenda formation and negotiating tactics. At the same time, those best placed to understand equality issues (women officials) lack credibility with their male colleagues. Even where women convinced their male colleagues to include equality issues on the agenda, employers insinuated that the union was not serious and persisted in trivializing them. This approach, in tough product market conditions, may appear common sense, diverting attention from the power relations at work. In this way, challenges were averted and the status quo remained (Lukes, 2005, p. 28).

Negotiating processes also served to blind-side potential challengers. This emanates from a negotiating strategy predicated upon wage leadership, which inevitably focused on male workers, who constituted Class 1, and fitted the employers' desire to push resources into skilled workers, 70 per cent of their workforce. Similarly, highlighting occupational segregation and non-pay equality issues, while blocking the re-evaluation of women's work also averted challenges, particularly when technology was reducing employment opportunities generally, but especially for the lower grades. When only procedural clauses resulted, this was not likely to deliver equal pay, especially given the evidence that neither employers nor union officials at local level were implementing these clauses. Failure of implementation constitutes Lukes's second dimension of power, non-decision-making (2005, p. 23).

The evidence reveals the limitations of structural change, seen in interim separatism and GPR. Technology did not strengthen women's hand because it concentrated work in the male-dominated Class 1 section. Without a critical mass, women could neither insist on equal pay's place on the agenda, nor prevent other equality items either slipping off the agenda early or being incorporated as procedural, rather than substantive, gains. Rather than the positive interaction of sub-processes seen in Findlay *et al.* (2009), in this study the dominance of traditional distributive bargaining prevented the potential mutual gains of integrative bargaining over equality issues, especially given the centrality of the agreement for craft pay as local 'top-up', negotiations declined. So, while many equality issues did make it onto the agenda, negotiating processes effectively ensured their continued invisibility in practice and women came to seem irrelevant to bargaining processes.

The results of these processes are seen in stubbornly wide gender pay differentials, wider than the national pay gap. But the final blow came with the collapse of the agreement. While bargaining processes may not have been unequivocally helpful to women, official statistics that show the gap continuing to widen since the agreement was abandoned, point towards a further deterioration for both women and men. While greater gender solidarity might not have prevented this outcome, it may have left the union better placed to follow the work into growth areas. But, for all its faults, collective bargaining produced higher pay than many 'women's jobs' commanded (Craig *et al.*, 1984, pp. 9, 54). Its failure presages hard times for all workers in the industry.

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