

Time's up! Feminist theory and activism meets organization studies

human relations

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Abstract

Feminism is a long established, often neglected empirical and theoretical presence in the study of organizations and social relations at work. This special issue provides a space for research that focuses on contemporary feminist practice and theory. We suggest that now is a new time for feminism, noting very recent examples of sexist oppression in social relations to illustrate why this rejuvenation is happening now. We then reflect on the process of knowledge production involved in guest editorial work for an organization studies journal like *Human Relations*, to address the issue of why feminism is so poorly represented in the journals that our academic community constructs as prestigious. We suggest that feminism provides opportunities for distinctive practices of knowledge production that challenge the patriarchal social formations which characterize academic work. We conclude with speculations about the future of feminism in organization studies.

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A new time for feminism

We are in the midst of a global renewal of feminist activism and theory. Feminism is as timely now as it ever has been. New forms of feminist activism and organizing are emerging as many women (and some men) demonstrate that they have had enough of sexist oppression and are actively engaged in resisting it. Social media and other online spaces have become essential vehicles in sharing experiences and mobilizing feminism in the name of a multiplicity of women's experiences that cut across race and social class distinctions and sexual orientations. New practices of feminist solidarity accompany these endeavours, manifest in global movements such as the Everyday Sexism Project,¹ #MeToo,² 1 Million Women,³ Women's Marches⁴ and others (see Vachhani and Pullen, this issue; Tyler, this issue). The title of this special issue introduction invokes a message used in one of these campaigns – Time's Up!⁵ – a phrase we think succinctly conveys the urgent need for more sustained engagement with feminism in the study of organization, social relations and work.

Feminism⁶ is a political and an intellectual project, a movement for social justice and equality as well as a means of theory development (Benschop and Verloo, 2016; Calás and Smircich, 2014). It is founded on the observation that gender and gendered racial inequality shape all aspects of social and economic life. Feminism's unique perspective encourages us to explore how patriarchal social formations such as hegemonic masculinities and neoliberal capitalism oppress and exploit. Feminist research asks questions that offer a unique and distinctive way of understanding social life, by 'seeing through what is already crazy about the world, notably the cruelty and injustice with which it tends to go about organizing itself' (Rose, 2014: x). Not to ask feminist questions about gendered social relations at work, in management and organizations is, in our view, to accept the gendered inequities, inequalities and violences that affect women in particular, and ultimately all of us.

The call for papers for this special issue, released in 2015, deliberately placed feminism at the centre of analysis. We did this in part because there is proportionately very little feminist analysis published in what many colleagues categorize as the most prestigious journals in our field. There are 15 journals that constitute the 'Management and Organization Studies' field in the *Financial Times* 50 (FT50) research ranking list. This list is often uncritically used to signify 'top' or 'excellent' research, defining for some what counts as legitimate knowledge. These 15 journals have published thousands of papers, developing a wide range of social, political and philosophical theories of work and organization. A significant body of work that draws on and contributes to feminism has been published in these journals; analyses speak to the experiences of both women and men in management and organization, develop theory in relation to core concepts in our field such as bureaucracy, and open new ways of thinking, such as embodiment. However, these journals position feminism as very much a minority interest, in terms of

papers published (fewer than 100 since 1990 across all of the 15 journals) and in terms of key debates. It is striking that a significant number of these journals have published no work that engages explicitly with feminism (e.g., *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Human Resource Management*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Journal of Management*, and *Strategic Management Journal*).

Human Relations, present on the FT50 list since January 2017, has published more than most (e.g. D'Enbeau and Buzzanell, 2013; Essers et al., 2013; Fotaki et al., 2014; Gatrell, 2013; Johansson et al., 2017; Kirton and Healy, 2012; Linstead and Pullen, 2006; Prasad, 2012; Runté and Mills, 2006; Simpson and Lewis, 2005; Sullivan and Delaney, 2017). We therefore regard this journal is the ideal location to further understanding of, and debate on, feminisms by positioning feminist theories and approaches as central to the production of knowledge in our field. The six pieces published here make a significant difference to the presence of feminism in these journals. Taken together, they constitute a body of work that signals an overdue step-change in how feminism is positioned within our field.

This special issue call also was provoked by the visible resurgence in the practice of feminism, a rejuvenation that continues today and shows few signs of losing momentum. The prominence of feminism in everyday life and popular debate is manifest in a range of ways. Media reporting of women's activism has increased significantly, as have accounts of the backlash that inevitably attends women raising their voices (Faludi, 1991; Jane, 2014). There is also increased global institutional recognition of feminism, such as in the United Nations (see actor Emma Watson's speech on gender equality⁷) and at elite political meetings (such as the feminist 'W7' summit as part of the 2018 'Group of 7' largest global industrial economies meeting), more political and celebrity endorsement of feminist campaigns, and high visibility on social media such as Twitter and blogsites. A further aspect of this most recent iteration of feminism involves men in positions of leadership self-identifying as feminist, such as former US President Barack Obama and current Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, provoking renewed debate about the role of men in the feminist movement. Taken together, we were confident that these societal and organizational developments provided a basis for generative theorizing and meaningful contributions to knowledge in our field. While these practices illustrate the growing importance of feminism as a societal and global force, they also demonstrate the hegemony of whiteness within movements that continue to favour the elites of the Global North. This is something that we seek to recognize in this introduction and call for more attention to in the future.

Feminisms across time and space

Narratives of how feminisms developed historically are often structured using the metaphor of 'waves'. While feminist practices can be understood to pre-date the existence of a coherent social movement, contemporary feminism is understood cumulatively and relationally in the context of earlier historical moments of activism and theorizing. This narrative begins with a 'first wave' positioned during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, followed by a second wave in the 1960s and 1970s, a third wave in the 1980s and onwards, and a putative fourth wave that is currently emerging (Munro, 2013). Early

North American and European feminist activists and thinkers are often categorized as focusing on suffrage and property rights, achieving considerable (if partial) success in both areas. In the mid-20th century, the second wave grew alongside civil rights activism in the US and elsewhere. This wave is usually represented as centred on the workplace and reproductive rights in the form of equal pay, access to contraception or abortion, and the right to be free from gendered violence. However, the wave metaphor is problematic because it simplifies complex realities, closing debates and homogenizing experiences (Gillis et al., 2007). It also encourages oversight of progress between these times periods, and corresponds mostly to developments in specific locations such as North America and Europe.

That latter observation suggests many histories of feminism are ‘whitewashed’ narratives that simplify tensions and ignore multiple voices in different places and spaces at different times. According to the conventional linear chronological narrative, both first and second waves often assume a ‘whiteness’, provoking the development of analysis grounded in intersectional theory (Crenshaw, 1991; see hooks, 1991) and transnational feminism (Mohanty, 2003). Intersectional theory, mostly developed by African American feminists, has provided the basis for a rich strand of critical cultural analysis. This shows that various matrices of oppression such as gender, race and class intersect in the experiences of women. As feminist and civil rights activist Audre Lorde (2007: 138) reminds us, ‘there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives’. Transnational feminism in turn drew attention to how feminist solidarity, mutuality, accountability and recognition of common interests across national and other borders, might enable the decolonization of knowledge and anti-capitalist critique (Mohanty, 2003).

Parallel to these developments, feminism became characterized in its third wave by more individualistic identity-oriented activism and theorizing. The collectivist orientation that had long characterized aspects of feminism is often viewed as having been undermined in this period by an orientation associated with the rise of postfeminist discourses, indicating a lack of cohesion in the absence of a single cause. Here the complexity of feminism expands significantly, indicated by the much contested term ‘postfeminism’ (Lewis, 2014). Debates surrounding postfeminism centre on whether it denotes a historical shift, an epistemological position or a theoretical movement (Gill et al., 2017). Empirically, postfeminism can be interpreted as an analytical object through its promotion of a ‘sensibility’ that constructs feminism in a highly specific way, as a means of empowerment through discourses of self-realization and sexual difference (Gill, 2007). This individualism plays out in an emphasis on choice and self over and above collective thinking and activism. Crucially, ‘structural gender inequalities are denied in favour of transferring the responsibility to overcome sexism onto the individual’ (Liu, 2018: 1).

Turning to contemporary feminisms it seems clear that women are no longer understood as autonomous individuals *or* as members of a universal social category. Feminism now enables insight into how gender intersects with race and ethnicity as well as social class in all areas of political, social and organizational life (Ahmed, 2017). Feminism can thus help to elucidate how and why whiteness remains the dominant yet unspoken norm in the Global North against which others are evaluated (Nkomo and Al Ariss, 2014). These powerful insights have changed debates about what feminism is and what it can do. Feminisms are many things and take a multitude of forms, sometimes even uniting

women and men in a common fight against sexism as the patriarchal ideology that rationalizes and justifies discriminatory social relations (Manne, 2018). At the same time, post-feminist discourses remain powerful today as cultural resources for describing the current gender regime (Gill et al., 2017), and are prominent in popular accounts of gendered experiences of inequality at work where they are used to construct a neoliberal postfeminist subject (Rottenberg, 2014).

As such, feminisms provide many means of appreciating the everyday experiences of different kinds of women (and men) in different circumstances per se, and also as a basis for recognizing emancipatory potential (Walby, 2011). For us, a primary importance of feminisms arises from offering a language, a vocabulary and a grammar, for naming, analysing and challenging discrimination, sexism and misogyny. Discrimination is most often experienced as differential treatment based on gendered categorization, especially when combined with attributes such as ethnicity and social class. The rationalizing ideology that justifies such practices of unequal treatment, exploitation and oppression is sexism (Manne, 2018). While there is diversity of experience in everyday life for both women and men, the dominant gender regime that exists today in virtually all societies is sexist in ways that result in the systematic marginalization, oppression and exploitation of women.

A further key lexical term in the language of feminism is misogyny, defined as an articulation of fear or hatred of women as a group, particularly when women demand equal rights to men in speech or action. In Manne's (2018: 78–79) terms, misogyny is the 'law enforcement' branch of patriarchy, in that it seeks to 'police and enforce' sexist norms and expectations in attempts to maintain male/masculine domination. Discrimination, sexism and misogyny may be experienced and analysed in their material, linguistic or symbolic forms. Misogyny, for example, is often manifest in language, verbal or written, including via the social media that have provided a new platform for attacking and silencing women (Jane, 2014; Mantilla, 2013; Poland, 2016). Symbolically, gendered identities may be constructed and maintained through the diminution and restriction of women linguistically as 'emotional' or 'sensitive', while male and masculine identities are enlarged or extended through authoritative terms such as 'order' or 'management' (Höpfl, 2007). Feminist theory provides unique analytical insight into such gendered social relations.

This has to stop!

Recent media stories reporting violent sexual harassment have helped to raise awareness of male domination and suppression of women through this means in a wide range of organizational and professional contexts. One of the highest profile exposés has involved the belated acknowledgement of continuing sexist oppression in creative arts such as the movie industry. This pattern is echoed in many other organizational contexts. For example, in 2018 at an annual 'men-only' fundraising dinner held in London by the Presidents Club, a registered charity, women were employed to work as hosts and table staff at the event. The women were groped, sexually harassed and propositioned by male senior businessmen, politicians and financiers.⁸ While in some ways these incidents and contexts may be considered exceptional, they expose the ongoing prevalence of violent sexual harassment in and around organizations. They also illustrate the extent to which

men as a social category continue to dominate organizational structures through relations of patriarchy that lead to sexual abuse and systematic discrimination. In so doing, they remind us why feminism is urgently needed.

Across the Global North, there is a sense that many women (and some men) have had enough of such sexism and misogyny and believe the time has come for change. *'This has to stop!'* is the message conveyed in the Everyday Sexism Project, quoted by Sheena Vachhani and Alison Pullen (this issue). These authors draw attention to 'affective solidarity' (Hemmings, 2012) as the basis for the effectiveness of this online social movement that combines two modes of feminist organizing – the politics of experience and empathy. The stories of everyday work-related sexism in Vachhani and Pullen's article are arresting in both their everyday banality and their exceptional violence. As Vachhani and Pullen observe, online environments create a space between public and private domains where encounters with 'known strangers' as embodied others are enabled (McLean and Maalsen, 2013). In attending to such encounters, these authors speak out against sexism and demand its cessation in solidarity with the voices of project participants. Melissa Tyler (this issue) offers a further example of the political organizational possibilities enabled by feminism, linking embodied recognition-based ethics with Butler's (2015) concept of assembly. Tyler concentrates on the material 'collective assembling of bodies' (Butler, 2015: 153), emphasizing how feminism connects with other foci of activism. She shows how Women's Marches and vigils after the mass shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Florida operate as collective assemblages, as a form of standing together, embodying opposition to sexism (Women Marches) and homophobia (post-Pulse vigils). These two articles provide rich insight into the meaning and significance of new forms of feminist organizing and their theoretical significance.

Feminism can also be interpreted as a response to sexist attacks on women in positions of leadership and visibility in public life. Media representations of women in leadership continue to focus on their bodies in ways that suggest an 'unfitness' for work and leadership (Bell and Sinclair, 2016; Sinclair, 2013). In professional and working lives, women are often deemed responsible for individually managing their bodies to conceal difference from hegemonic masculine norms (Kenny and Bell, 2011). Here we offer a couple of recent examples. In early 2018, New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern was interviewed by experienced Australian journalist Charles Wooley, who treated the interview as an opportunity to communicate repeatedly how 'attractive' he found Ardern, focusing his questions on her pregnancy and the conception of her baby,⁹ questioning her ability to continue in her job and simultaneously grow a person. In a different cultural context, reacting to the news that the President of the Republic of Finland Sauli Niinistö had become a father aged 69, local media did not question in any way his authority and capability to do the job as a consequence of his new family status. This is not surprising as late fatherhood is seen to demonstrate virility, interpreted as evidence of power. These contrasting examples demonstrate the prevalence of sexist norms and values in contemporary public life in ways that impact upon lived experiences in work and organizations, and further testify to the importance of feminisms today.

This special issue contributes to reaffirming, maintaining and developing feminism in these contexts. In editing it we have worked as a team of two women and two men. This

raises reflexive questions about the position of the two male editors in engaging with feminist theory and activism. A key concern is that men can never experience sexism the same way as women and are therefore excluded from 'being feminist'. Some scholars see feminism as the terrain and prerogative of women, and prefer men to adopt terms such as 'pro-feminist' (Hearn, 2014). Feminism is thus regarded as 'a subject for women who are, precisely, its subjects, the people who make it; it is their affair' (Heath, 1987: 8–9). However, as Heath further argues, 'feminism is also a subject for me [as a man] . . . Feminism speaks to me, not principally nor equally but *too*' (pp. 8–9; emphasis in original). This latter position involves acknowledgement of the risk that men can come to occupy a prominent position by treating feminism as just another theoretical position through which they can further their own advantage (Taylor and Tienari, 2018). In other words it is always worth asking, in Elaine Showalter's memorable words, 'whether male feminism is a form of critical cross-dressing, a fashion risk . . . that is both radical chic and power play' (1987: 120).

Yet African American feminist scholar and activist bell hooks (2000) argues that visionary feminists have always understood the necessity of 'converting' men into active participants and supporters. Without men as allies in struggle, she argues, the feminist movement may not progress as much as it might (see also Tarrant, 2009). We respect the complexity of these positionalities and we understand if some consider the involvement of men in feminist theory and activism problematic. However, we hope to show that there is space for men to be involved in the ends of feminism, even though they are not subject to the directly embodied experiences of sexist discrimination and misogyny.

Constructing (feminist) knowledge: An uncertain process

Feminist theory and activism are also crucial in understanding everyday experiences of academic organization, processes and practices of knowledge production (Phillips et al., 2014; Pullen and Rhodes, 2015; Stanley, 1990; Wolf, 1992). Sexism, misogyny and patriarchy are constitutive features of academic working life (Van den Brink and Benschop, 2014) that shape the academic labour process. These dynamics intersect with racism in universities and academic work (Gabriel and Tate, 2017). As we have already mentioned, reviews of published work in management and organization studies show that feminisms remain marginalized and silenced as theory and praxis (Benschop and Verloo, 2016; Calás and Smircich, 1996, 2014; Harding et al., 2012; Lewis and Simpson, 2012; Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012). Calás and Smircich (2014) argue that the patriarchal politics of academia mean that feminism has been positioned primarily as a form of activism, rather than a source of legitimate knowledge.

As published research demonstrates (see Eagly and Carli, 2003), it is possible to analyse sex discrimination or sexist exclusion from non-feminist perspectives. This relies on decoupling the study of gender-as-sex from feminist principles of inquiry. This approach remains common in many articles on 'gender' published in prestigious management and organization studies journals (Ely and Padavic, 2007). While this research helpfully illuminates how structures, practices and processes in organizations are gendered, it often does not fulfil the feminist objectives of analysing and questioning sexist exploitation and the oppression or domination of women; nor does it address how knowledge is produced in our field in ways that marginalize and exclude women. We are therefore pleased

that two articles in this special issue (Huopalaïinen and Satama; Jack, Riach and Bariola) are based on empirical work in universities, using one of our own professional contexts to gain insight into the everyday, 'ordinary' experiences of sexism in academic organizations. Gaining insight into these experiences is essential in enabling sexist and oppressive cultures of knowledge production to be questioned and challenged.

We have also approached knowledge and knowledge production as inherently political (Stanley, 1990) and framed by patriarchal conditions of practice (Walby, 1989). This implies engagement in (self)critical reflection on the processes and practices of knowledge production and their consequences, a topic central to feminist activism and thought. In particular in guest editing this special issue, we sought to remain open to uncertainty as a fundamental principle of feminist social science, theory construction and way of making knowledge claims (Snitow, 2015). This recognition may be an additional reason why feminist theory remains in a marginal position in our field – and why it is important to reflect on feminist knowledge production in this editorial. Whether focused on the university or society at large, feminist projects entail critiquing and challenging established power relations, envisioning alternatives and possibilities in terms of theory and engaging in activism for change. Feminist interventions in universities can have considerable local, institutional impact (Katila and Meriläinen, 1999, 2002), and there is considerable unrealized potential within our field to develop different forms of critical practice informed by feminisms (Ashcraft, 2018).

The need for feminist spaces in management and organization studies was demonstrated when we ran a conference track on this theme at the biennial 2015 International Critical Management Studies (CMS) Conference. CMS is a community that has had an ambivalent reputation in relation to feminism and wider inclusivity (Tatli, 2012), despite the complementarity between critical perspectives and feminist thought (Ashcraft, 2016). The track was one of the largest at the conference in terms of papers submitted, resulting in lively presentations and discussions. We were heartened to see more spaces for feminist research created by colleagues at the 2017 CMS conference. Again, the track was over-subscribed, well attended and characterized by lively debate (albeit in a somewhat bizarrely ironic space, a hotel bedroom converted into a tiny conference space). Feminisms are also being debated at other management and organization studies conferences, although sometimes in ways that relegate them to the periphery.¹⁰ A further development that signals the resurgence of feminist management and organization studies involves VIDA, a network founded in 2009 to support the work of women, queer, trans and non-binary people working in business schools and academia, in struggles against discrimination, harassment, marginalization and exploitation (Contu, 2018). By offering a safe space for women to share experiences, ask for advice and provide support, this community aims to put into practice intersectional feminism, encourages action according to an ethic of care, builds solidarity structures and enclaves, and seek to change our profession from within. VIDA's manifesta notes 'the tendency to machismo, incredulity, one-upmanship and acidity, as well as the continuing reliance on what one brand of feminism calls the Dead White European Men' (Times Higher Education, 2013) that much academic work assumes as good practice, something we also sought to be conscious of throughout this editorial process.

In pursuing the idea of a journal special issue, we were reminded early on that feminism can be viewed as dangerous by the powerful. We initially submitted a special issue

proposal to another prestigious journal in our field with the aim of reviving feminist conversation there. The editorial response was polite on the surface, but dismissive, calling into question the relevance of feminist theory and practice to organization studies. Other reasons offered for the rejection by the (male, white) editors included lack of editorial diversity in institutional affiliation, noting that the editorial team represented only two countries. Working on ‘our hunches’ we sensed something was ‘amiss, not quite right’ (Ahmed, 2017: 12) with this response, but accepted it without formal or public protest. This can be how feminism works – we come up against something that feels wrong, sensing it in our bodies even if we cannot find the words for it (Ahmed, 2017; Hemmings, 2012). Ashcraft (2018) refers to this as ‘discernment’, calling for organization studies scholars to develop their capacity to *feel* relations of power through the body, including those that pertain to their own work/places. It is by acquiring the words to describe what we come up against that feminism names a problem and begins the process of assembly and action. In contrast to our experience, we later discovered that a special issue proposal developed by a group of scholars from a single country had been simultaneously accepted. Something really *was* not quite right, as we had sensed.

By proposing a special issue on feminism to *Human Relations*, we sought to recognize a wrong and try to redress it, enabled by the positive encouragement of then journal Editor-in-Chief Paul Edwards and the Associate Editor group, and with the support of current Editor-in-Chief Nick Turner, along with Managing Editor Claire Castle and her team throughout. This process has also been greatly enabled by the generosity of numerous members of the *Human Relations* editorial board in providing developmental reviews. In retrospect, this journal is where we should have started with our proposal, and we consider ourselves and contributors fortunate to be in this space. Our call for papers sought empirical evidence and theorizing on the materiality of embodied experiences of the workplace. We encouraged contributions from scholars who analyse the different contents (causes and struggles) and forms (ways of organizing) that characterize feminist activism in contemporary workplaces and policy settings. Finally, we invited new empirical evidence and theorizing on connections between contemporary feminisms and different forms of workplace ethics. All of this and much more came to the journal and to us through the work submitted.

Editing this special issue: Challenges of feminism and knowledge production

The timeliness of the feminist theme was confirmed in part by the number of submissions received. We expected around 20 papers to be submitted; we received nearly 50. Due to the large number of submissions and the potential burden on reviewers, we had to desk reject many more papers than we wanted to. While all of the papers were concerned with gender, often conceptualized as biological sex, the explicit focus on feminism was sometimes less apparent, and this provided a basis for excluding some papers from consideration. Despite the volume of work submitted, and while the scope of the call was intended to be broad and inclusive, we also suspect that some feminist scholars may not have felt at home in the special issue call, perhaps because the (white European) guest editorial team did not embody intersectional, postcolonial or decolonial feminist experience.

As scholars from the Global North, we are mindful that we will always speak from a particular position. We are carriers of privileges and run the risk of essentializing those we seek to represent in our studies, thus contributing to a necessarily limited view of feminist theory and activism. Crucial elements of contemporary feminist theory and activism remain unaddressed in this special issue. This includes women in the Global South who continue to be exploited by multinational corporations and local gender orders (Alamgir and Banerjee, 2018; Berry and Bell, 2012; Özkazanc-Pan, 2012). Nor do we adequately acknowledge the ‘various others’ such as nannies and cleaners, who leave their homes and families, travelling to do the care work that enables women (and men) in the Global North to focus on their careers (Calás and Smircich, 2011). Intersecting markers of difference such as gender, ethnicity and class, then, serve to legitimize different practices that produce inequalities in the division of labour on a global scale (Calás et al., 2010). While new forms of feminism are taking issue with sexism and oppression in these working contexts, they are addressed only indirectly in this special issue. Feminists in the Global South remind us that women do not universally face the same experiences and that the reasons behind their inequality are varied (Mohanty, 2013). There is thus a need to decentre the white, Western woman who has been the main subject of feminism, and we trust that more feminist work can be submitted to this journal to this end.

In terms of process, several aspects of editing this special issue exposed the tensions between feminism and processes of producing academic knowledge. First, we experienced challenges in trying to adhere to feminist principles during the process of peer review. Some papers that we found brave and thought provoking received harsh criticism from (female and male) reviewers, sometimes including reviewer comments that were surprisingly hostile in content and tone. Authors were always professional with their responses and dealt meticulously with the comments, no matter how aggressive. In their last letter to us and the reviewers the authors of one paper reflected on the process:

We are grateful for the mixed reviews – they make you question every word! . . . We’d like to thank the reviewers for their generosity which in one case doesn’t come across very generously but we really welcome their frankness.

While ungenerous practice might be considered ‘normal’ behaviour in the highly competitive process of academic peer review today, we found it surprising in the context of this special issue. This reflects our perhaps naïve assumption that those who associate themselves with feminisms would exhibit support and generosity to others who do so, because they would be aware of the destructive potential of marginalization and silencing of others’ views. One hostile reviewer can make a huge difference to the outcome of the review process. In this case, we worked on the basis of the more constructive reviews that helped the authors develop their work. More generally, it seems to us that (guest) editors today are sometimes unwilling to take a stand, and may choose to hide behind hostile reviewers in decision making. This has repercussions that are particularly problematic for marginalized bodies of knowledge such as feminist theory in organization studies. If one hostile gatekeeper from three or four peer reviewers can rule out new or different voices, the peer review system becomes unreliable in its representation of a field.

Second, we were confronted with the issue of feminist citation practices. Critiques of the veneration of ‘great men’ and gendered theoretical development suggests refusal to cite some works in preference to others, as a way of challenging established dogmas in academic knowledge production. Citation practices were raised by one reviewer in correspondence with us (although not in their communication with the author); the reviewer was unhappy with the number of references to work authored by men cited in the paper when, in their view, feminist alternatives written by women were available. We agreed. Whose work we are socialized into citing (and whose to avoid) is an important part of how knowledge is produced, and how patriarchal practices in the academy are reinforced (Ahmed, 2017). For this reason, we follow the principle of primarily citing academic work published by women in this editorial. We suggest that citation practices and the often ceremonial citing of ‘canonized’ men’s work deserves more critical attention in management and organization studies. Like other fields (Rossiter, 1993), we believe that our field systematically under-recognizes research done by women (Czarniawska and Sévon, 2018).

Third, throughout the editorial process we were forced to think carefully about differing conceptions of what qualifies as competent academic writing. Critiques of dominant forms and styles of writing within our field address what is typically left unsaid when academic writers learn to assume the normalcy of masculine vocabularies of rigour, hardness and penetrating conclusiveness (Phillips et al., 2014: 316) through adherence to a grammatical logic of trajectory, strategy and purpose (Höpfl, 2011: 32). In its hegemonic, masculinized form, academic knowledge production is a project oriented towards conveying certainty in a particular, sometimes violent, way (Ashcraft, 2018). Feminist scholars challenge this through their writing practices. For example, ‘dirty writing’ involves a high degree of messiness and uncertainty, especially in relation to the modernist ideal of rational progress (Pullen and Rhodes, 2008). It is unsanitized, and speaks to the readers in and through its form. Writing differently (Grey and Sinclair, 2006) from a feminist perspective takes on political and emancipatory meanings, as conversations on feminine or women’s writing and writing ‘from the body’ demonstrate (e.g. Bell and Sinclair, 2016; Höpfl, 2011; Pullen and Rhodes, 2015).

Feminist critique therefore begins by rendering gendered writing open for discussion, to enable a multitude of affectual voices and texts, creating spaces where different forms of expression are explored and appreciated (Pullen and Rhodes, 2015). Feminist writing also seeks to challenge forms of theorizing, especially hierarchies of thought, that position some work as inferior and less worthy of attention. As hooks (1991: 4) warns, ‘one of the many uses of theory in academic locations is in the production of an intellectual class hierarchy where the only work deemed truly theoretical is work that is highly abstract, jargonistic, difficult to read, and containing obscure references that may not be at all clear or explained’. These assumptions play into the ways in which scholars are socialized into writing. Writing too easily turns into a purely intellectual and individualistic activity that seeks to demonstrate theoretical mastery, as the embodied, sensuous, emotional, social and identity-related aspects of writing are routinely downplayed and denied (Kiriakos and Tienari, 2018).

One paper accepted for publication here refused to follow the traditional format of academic writing from the outset. The final published article is more conventional

than earlier versions; this is mostly due to the review process. In general, however, few papers submitted to the special issue engaged in directly subversive strategies vis-à-vis malestream writing practice, or sought to produce theory that could easily be ‘shared in everyday conversation’ (hooks, 1991: 5) as they are written here. Looking back, we wonder whether we might have insisted further on the need to challenge established academic conventions of writing, rather than reproducing them. Could we have supported more different and unsanitized writing? Pushing the boundaries of what counts as knowledge, would such papers have been accepted as legitimate by the readers of *Human Relations*? Our editorial experience tells us that ‘different’ kinds of academic text present challenges to audiences in our field, as well as to those in positions of institutional power, such as editors, associate editors and reviewers. Notwithstanding these challenges, we are pleased and proud of the contributions to this special issue and the ways in which the authors have approached the complex process of feminist knowledge production.

Feminisms. Here. Now.

Each of the papers in this special issue generates knowledge through engagement with action in the social world. The first two articles deal with the embodied ethics of the body, bringing to bear theoretical perspectives imbued with diverse feminist sensibilities. In different ways they encourage consideration of the interplay between individual actions and collective responsibility by reflecting on contemporary examples of feminist solidarity. *Ethics, politics and feminist organizing: Writing feminist infrapolitics and affective solidarity into everyday sexism* (Vachhani and Pullen, 2018) analyses a well-known and highly influential global feminist movement with significant implications for understanding workplaces, The Everyday Sexism Project (ESP). Sheena J Vachhani and Alison Pullen draw on the work of Clare Hemmings (2011, 2012) to develop the idea of affective solidarity, an empathic, radical, ethical, political approach to practising and theorizing feminism. More than anything their account of the ESP observes how solidarity informs resistance, and vice versa.

The article, *Reassembling difference? Rethinking inclusion through/as embodied ethics* by Melissa Tyler (2018), reflects on the recent discursive shift towards the notion of inclusion in social relations at work. This conceptual paper engages closely with the work of Judith Butler to provoke thought on the political nature of inclusion when practised in an organizational context. Tyler’s argument focuses on the embodied recognition-based ethics of inclusion, linking to assembly through the examples of Women’s Marches and vigils after the mass shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Florida in 2016. Such assemblies are premised on recognition of our shared intercorporeal vulnerability and the basic need that we have to acknowledge that. However, Tyler argues that the organizational form of assembly, inclusion, risks exploitation of the ethics of assembly. Tyler suggests a different approach: an embodied ethico-politics of co-presence based on mutual recognition of inter-subjectivity, to open up the possibility of a more critical alternative to the instrumental championing of inclusion as a means to an end.

The third article, *Splitting and blaming: The psychic life of neoliberal executive women* by Darren T Baker and Elizabeth K Kelan (2018), explores the work experiences of women in accounting and finance. This article is based on an empirical project that analyses women's accounts of everyday working life in the executive and upper/middle management positions conventionally thought of as senior and gendered male. The analysis centres on women who have attained these positions and are therefore defined as successful under the current gender regime. The authors' detailed and empathetic discourse analysis which draws on psychosocial theory generates insight into the complex relationship between experiences of discrimination, success and ambivalence towards the dominant neoliberal economic social formation they work within (and against). It suggests that understanding of (the lack of) women in powerful organizational positions has become rather one-sided, locating them as ideological carriers rather than as people, and provokes considerable thought as to future research in this area.

The fourth and fifth papers in the special issue explore the generative potential of, and temporalities associated with, female bodies as they interact and intersect with the patriarchal social relations of organizations. *Mothers in the making: Negotiating 'new' motherhood within the 'new' academia* by Astrid S Huopalaainen and Suvi T Satama (2018) draws on the experience of working in neoliberalized academic organizations, to undertake an intersectional analysis of gestation, birth and parenthood. This autoethnographic article provides an account of the embodied negotiation of organizational novelty, which is contrasted with the distinctive temporality of maternity. It is a detailed exploration of the conflict between the construction of disembodied professionalism and the lived experience of embodied transformation. The personal, professional and political are brought together in analysis of these inherently messy, fleshy, threatening, beautiful, hopeful interactions.

The fifth article, *Temporality and gendered agency: Menopausal subjectivities in women's work* by Gavin Jack, Kathleen Riach and Emily Bariola (2018), brings the lived experience of menopause at work into focus. It presents an analysis of an interview study of women working in universities and identifies temporal modalities embedded in their experiences. The researchers make two contributions to understanding social relations at work: they revive a latent debate on the ontology of time, and elaborate on the notion of a body politics of surprise when unpredictable fleshy beings are at work. Through their richly contextualized account of 'what a body can do' they suggest that unpredictability is at the very centre of bodily experiences at work and feminist politics. The articles by Huopalaainen and Satama and Jack, Riach and Bariola exemplify a trend in feminist research where by the female body is seen as a source of opportunity. Discourses of the body, materiality and the corporeality of the lived body are all significant parts and sources of this form of contemporary feminist theorizing and writing (Alaimo et al., 2008; Katila, 2018).

The final contribution to the special issue is written by Amanda Sinclair: *Five movements in an embodied feminism: A memoir* (2018). This is a relatively unusual paper, for our field and this journal, combining autobiography, autoethnography, theory development, retrospect and prospect. The narrative argument has a clear central substantive

purpose – to demonstrate the embodied nature of feminism in working lives and, in doing so, to remind us that there is always more to working life than can be found in research, teaching, reading and writing. As Amanda emphasizes, feminism offers a constant source of inspiration and a way of life at all stages of our lives.

The struggles continue

We have argued that the time has come, again, for feminism as a theoretical perspective to be used to understand and challenge sexism in organization, social relations and work, and to take centre stage alongside other theoretical perspectives in organization studies. Like feminist activism, this project is inherently future oriented, because its purpose is to analyse and challenge sexist discrimination with a view to creating alternatives. Sara Ahmed encourages us to maintain such commitments, ‘holding on to the projects that are projects insofar as they have yet to be realized’ (2017: 235). It may be that feminism remains a project in this sense, without end but always with clear purpose. If this is the case, the work presented here shows very clearly how social relations at work are better understood through feminism. We trust that readers of *Human Relations* find the contributions to this special issue worthwhile and a source of inspiration for their work and lives.

Alongside many feminist activists and theorists, we also retain a sense of hope that historical and contemporary injustices can be recognized, protested, analysed and, ultimately, overcome. The list of contributions that feminism has made to progressive social and economic change is remarkable. The historical length and social breadth of protest, theory and change are perhaps greater than any other academic position: the extension of suffrage, equality of property rights, equal access to education, equal pay and contributions to wider social movements such as anti-racist and sexual orientation civil rights movements, can all be traced or linked to feminism. Yet these struggles are ongoing, suggesting that feminism continues to play a crucial role in progressive change towards ending sexist oppression.

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Notes

- 1 See <https://everydaysexism.com/> (accessed 9 May 2018).
- 2 The hashtag was created in 2017 to convey the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault in the workplace, following widespread allegations made against film producer Harvey Weinstein.
- 3 A movement of women and girls oriented towards ‘building a lifestyle revolution to fight the climate crisis’. See <https://www.1millionwomen.com/> (accessed 9 May 2018).
- 4 See <https://www.womensmarchglobal.com/> (accessed 9 May 2018).
- 5 ‘Time’s Up’ is a feminist movement against sexual assault, harassment and inequality in the workplace that was founded in January 2018 in response to sexual abuse in the Hollywood film industry. See <https://www.timesupnow.com/> (accessed 9 May 2018).

- 6 Unless stated otherwise, in this editorial we refer to feminism in the singular as political activism. Feminisms in the plural refer to the multiplicity of feminist commitments, theories and approaches.
- 7 Emma Watson: Gender equality is your issue too. *UN Women*, 20 September 2014. Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/9/emma-watson-gender-equality-is-your-issue-too> (accessed 9 May 2018).
- 8 'Men Only: Inside the charity fundraiser where hostesses are put on show', *Financial Times*, 23 January 2018. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/075d679e-0033-11e8-9650-9c0ad2d7c5b5> (accessed 9 May 2018).
- 9 'Jacinda Ardern's "sexist, creepy" 60 Minutes interview angers New Zealand'. *The Guardian*, 26 February 2018. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/26/sexist-creepy-jacinda-ardern-60-minutes-interview-angers-new-zealand> (accessed 9 May 2018).
- 10 Such as the European Academy of Management (EURAM), British Academy of Management (BAM) and US Academy of Management (AOM) conferences, and the European Colloquium for Organization Studies (EGOS) conference, which hosts women's network meetings.

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