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## Problematizing Qualitative Research in Organisations: Three voices, three subjectivities, three struggles

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Review

## **Problematizing Qualitative Research in Organisations: Three voices, three subjectivities, three struggles**

### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** In this paper three of us illustrate our multiple subjectivities, in research and in practice which are ever shifting in context with each other. We present richness of understanding which can be revealed when we eschew consensus, certainty and easy solutions. We aim to show that plurality of ontological and epistemological approaches combined with diversity in understanding and subjective experience is necessary in qualitative research in organisations.

**Approach:** We take a playful and incomplete narrative approach in our critical reflection on our subjectivities being silenced or ignored in organisations and in academia.

We present an unsettling and ambiguous read but our aim is to question the formulaic, linear, simplistic solutions and structures evident in organisations and academia that silence uncertainty, emotions, voice and creativity through standardisation and the rhetoric of collaboration for performance enhancement. This process we have termed philosophical violence.

**Findings:** We identify philosophical violence as a dominant theme in qualitative research, in organisational practice and within academia. In contrast, our embodied subjectivities preclude us reaching agreement or consensus too quickly, or indeed, at all. Our embodied struggles add to our understanding of ambiguity, difference, critical reflexivity and understanding, providing richness and accommodating diversity and paradox in our inquiries in our organisations.

**Originality/ Value:** We show our struggles as hopeful and our non-collaborative collaboration as a resource from which we can individually and jointly develop new understandings of working and thus survive the philosophical violence found in organisations and in research. Honouring subjectivities is essential for rich qualitative research in organisations.

**Key Words:** intersectionality, post-structuralism, feminism, power, queer theory, critical reflexivity

### **Ladies and gentlemen, we introduce your narrators**

The three of us met whilst working on our PhDs in a group environment from 2003 to 2010. Liz Hayes, *The Reluctant* (2010), worked with reluctance, playful subversion and fundamentalist thinking in her management consultancy practice with organisations. Clare Hopkinson, *The Reflective* (2010), inquired into nurses reflecting in the hospital ward and Alan Taylor, *The Queer* (2009), queried and queered the organisation. Each of us presented our work in creative ways that included our 'selves' and passions as we sought to be critically reflexive about our inquiries in an applied subjective way.

We have used the terms Reluctant, Reflective and Queer to discriminate the three authors of the text, given that convention dictates that anonymity of authorship is essential to the peer review of submitted academic papers. To some degree, however, this immediately draws attention to our troubled voices and subjectivities, and enacts the struggles we elucidate through the remainder of this paper. We are immediately silenced as identifiable subjects to some degree. We know it's a big ask of our readers to tolerate the subsequent complexity, ambition and ambiguity, but we see no other way to invite you to enter into the ontological and epistemological dilemmas we stumble over in our academic lives.

Since the completion of our PhDs we have found ways of inquiring together. Philosophically we differed in positioning our PhDs: *The Reluctant* used feminist approaches (Naples, 2003), and praxis wisdom, *The Reflective* used Bourdieu's (1990) Logic of Practice and *The Queer* drew upon Queer Theory (de Lauretis, 1991) as well as the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1983). Our research interests interweave around leadership and health and social care. Two of us work at universities in the UK and one is an organisational development practitioner in Ireland. Within and against a possible framing of commonality of interest and/or focus, we are discovering that our embodied subjectivities preclude us reaching agreement or consensus too quickly, or often indeed, at all. For example, we write from our own subjectivities that include our differing experiences and body of knowledge and we come from different disciplines and positioning yet we all hold the position of living life as inquiry (Marshall, 2004). We don't always agree as our passions and strength of voice can be different at different times. Sometimes when two of us are in agreement, and the other is not, the other can feel an outsider or experience the disagreement as a personal attack. This taps into our fragilities. *The Reflective*, as a nurse, sometimes brings her own personal and cultural "baggage" of being dismissed raising feelings of anger or being personally criticised. This can work to fuel a deeper conversation alternatively she can feel as if her voice has less influence and is less important. Furthermore, as a heterosexual woman how can she fully appreciate the lived experience of *The Queer's* working life in an organisation or how the *Reluctant* experiences the pressures of resisting fundamentalist thinking whilst creating and sustaining her consultancy business? What level of authority does she have to comment on the direction of the paper when it is positioned using the theory of intersectionality and post-structuralism when her embodied subjectivity finds some structures comforting for example Bourdieu's (1990) notions of habitus and field during her own PhD, an author at odds with post-structuralism?

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3 Rather than see these tensions as problematic, however, we understand our  
4 diversity and our various subjectivities as resources from which we can  
5 individually and jointly develop new understandings. We three have found we  
6 have to agree to disagree, and we have developed a methodology of non-  
7 collaborative collaboration to ensure that the reflexive subjectivity of each of us  
8 is honoured.  
9

10 We find this work challenging and at the same time hopeful. We will argue that  
11 this philosophical pluralism and nomadism, fluid and contingent, contextual and  
12 transient sustains and supports our personal resilience in challenging practice  
13 contexts, as well as deepening our learning and enriching our research.  
14

15 And now, as we struggle with our early-career post-doctoral research identities  
16 (while we grow into our mid-fifties in chronological age) we work at the  
17 interstices of two systems which are both predicated on the certainties and  
18 consensus of science: Higher Education, specifically in post-1992 institutions in  
19 the UK; and healthcare. It's both diverting, and terrifying, to be navigating this  
20 environment with postmodern and post-structural feminist sensibilities. As  
21 experienced professionals seeking to enhance our teaching, mentoring,  
22 consulting and organising, we find that our subjective identities, and our  
23 different approaches, are not easily accommodated by healthcare research,  
24 academic norms or organisational praxis. When we remind ourselves that those  
25 identities in themselves are fluid and shifting (McDonald, 2013) we realise that  
26 the systems we find ourselves in are doubly terrified of our subjectivities and  
27 terrifying to our subjectivities. Indeed we find that health and social care, and  
28 perhaps public administration in general are sometimes viciously at odds with  
29 our subjectivities. So we can agree that neither an intersectional approach nor  
30 the notion of habitus, nor acceptance of reluctance are given much credence in  
31 an organisational or healthcare environment which values evidence-based  
32 practice or certainty above all else. We thus experience dissonance and  
33 paradoxes when our notions of knowledge or truth(s) are not readily  
34 accommodated within our research and practice contexts.  
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38 So we find ourselves living life as inquiry (Marshall, 2004) in our exploration of,  
39 or re-searching, research itself, particularly in its relation to practice. Thus we  
40 challenge each other in a critically reflexive process. We are trying to find ways  
41 to establish our own academic credentials while paying attention to the learning  
42 we have *experienced*, which has enabled us to develop our voices, yet which may  
43 have condemned us to struggle with our subjectivities in an environment where  
44 even radical perspectives have a powerful grammar and set of taken-for-granted  
45 assumptions. While this is somewhat in line with Caroline Ramsay's (2014)  
46 argument that a scholarship of practice should be focussed on attention rather  
47 than knowledge, our attention to our experience drives it home to us that too  
48 often it is *knowledge* which is privileged. So social work and social policy  
49 colleagues who espouse anti-oppressive practice are sometimes the most  
50 dirigiste in their insistence on a Marxist paradigm; queer theorists and feminists  
51 may engage in oppositional dialectic which refuses nuance and paradox; and so  
52 post-modernism and post-colonialism can feel more -ism than post anything.  
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56 A renowned academic writing on gender seems to be sexist and bullying at a  
57 conference, and a fellow delegate reflects that he's always like that. A colleague  
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3 known for anti-oppressive writing dogmatically closes down discussion,  
4 insisting that it's neo-liberalism at play again.

5  
6 We thus experience many struggles to respect and build on knowledge and  
7 academic tradition, sometimes finding it does not fully serve our purposes, it  
8 does not allow us space to articulate our thinking, which we illustrate later in the  
9 paper in a story of attempting to get a paper published that does not use the  
10 traditional research structure. We recognise that you the reader may struggle, in  
11 turn, as we explicitly honour contradiction and confusion, but we do not intend  
12 to cause *unnecessary* confusion and hope this writing contrasts with the  
13 generally accepted nature of academic discourse, with its theses and antitheses  
14 its propositions and contestations. This paper is rhetorical, motile, performative  
15 as well as non-collaborative in keeping with a post-structural philosophy.

16  
17 The hope is that the text becomes open to you the reader and through exposing  
18 our three subjectivities we find a proliferation of meaning, an opening potential  
19 for interpretation rather than what we could describe as a coherent or  
20 collaborative-conclusion.  
21

### 22 23 **Writing into our subjectivities and positioning this paper**

24 What is subjectivity in research anyway? Bourdieu argued in *The Logic of*  
25 *Practice* (1990) that setting subjectivism against objectivism is an artificial  
26 divide; a polarisation that is unhelpful in social science research. In much  
27 empirical and social science research, detached propositional knowing and  
28 objective positioning is highly regarded with subjective and action orientated  
29 inquiry seen as less worthy (Brydon-Miller et al 2003; Heron 1996). In positivist  
30 approaches relationships exist but are often denied as relevant or as not  
31 influencing the process at all. Bourdieu (1993) would argue that a doxa exists;  
32 that is, an assumption so taken for granted that it is not noticed or questioned. So  
33 rather than deny our plural subjectivities, here we query the fantasy of  
34 objectivity. The cut of our knives alienates objectivity at precisely this juncture in  
35 a reversal of the norm, naming the doxa.  
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38 In healthcare research, action research does not appear in the hierarchy of  
39 research evidence and you will nowhere find a post-structural research  
40 approach. Additionally, randomised control trials are at the top of the taxonomy  
41 (Evans, 2003) denying the existence of subjectivity. We have all experienced this  
42 bias against subjective research directly through ethics research committees.  
43 Specifically, they have insisted that I, the Reflective, could not include students I  
44 was currently teaching and assessing in a piece of action research. In contrast,  
45 the participatory action research paradigm presupposes that the specific and  
46 situated nature of the research is what makes a real difference to those engaged  
47 with the process. Interpretations obtained through a detached observer are less  
48 likely to provide the richness and validity of those arrived at through inquiry  
49 with others (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). I learnt from my ethical approval  
50 encounters how unquestioning of ontological positioning is the scientific  
51 mainstream. Nevertheless, as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) and Foucault  
52 (1980) argued those who determine the value of knowledge hold the power. We  
53 see that in healthcare research|practice we experience, resist and survive (and  
54 enact) power and its concomitant violence against ourselves, our subjectivities,  
55 as well as each other.  
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3 We consider ourselves practitioners as well as researchers, and as mentioned  
4 above, are self-consciously re-searching research, to make sense for ourselves  
5 and hopefully for others. By this we mean that together we are inquiring into the  
6 enactment of research; our struggle to find academic voice; and the particularity  
7 of our own subjectivities in an ontological arena which would seem to preclude  
8 any notion of subjectivity in itself. The tensions in representing the self  
9 elucidated by Kathryn Haynes (2011) in this journal, are multiplied, braided and  
10 interwoven in trying to collaborate in our writing together.

11  
12 We offer a mosaic of stories, which are incomplete reflections of our struggles as  
13 we develop the practices of critical reflexivity within our own research | practice.  
14 We recognise that “narration is the quintessential form of customary knowledge,  
15 in more ways than one” Lyotard (1984: 19) and therefore attempt to provide a  
16 story that nomadically meanders in line with the reality of practice. Ordinarily,  
17 “(w)riting conventions typically prevent a text from appearing too contradictory  
18 and confusing for the reader” (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000: 78), so it is a delicate  
19 balance to accommodate the paradoxes in this display.

20  
21 We narrate the risks associated with encouraging an empowerment dynamic  
22 through a deliberate focus on investigating culture and context with a critical  
23 eye. We also reflect on the constraints of publication illustrating how our plural  
24 subjectivities, and the underpinning philosophical positions, become radically  
25 challenging, if not totally unacceptable, to the mainstream consensus on research  
26 within our field(s) of practice. As we endeavour to enact, or reify, or express our  
27 positions, our philosophies of knowledge, of research, and of practice are  
28 frequently labelled as too difficult, or too complex to be even acknowledged  
29 within a field which is forever demanding clearly defined research practices, pre-  
30 definition of research questions, processes, protocols and predetermined  
31 outcomes.

32  
33 In the context of this paper, we also express some of our nervousness around the  
34 split between practice and research by adopting the term research|practice. This  
35 may also appear as practice|research as both terms (and both activities) are  
36 equally important to us, and for us, impossible to untangle from one another. So  
37 the first paradox we identify explicitly is that we seek to be grounded in day-to-  
38 day action, as much as philosophical abstraction, and perhaps conflate these in  
39 our subjectivities, in a sustained tension.

40  
41 For example in the practices of adult learning and organisational development  
42 we have experienced how practice demands a critically reflexive muscle that  
43 permits the messiness (Schön and Rein, 1974) to be more visible. Linden West,  
44 (1996) argues that higher education also has the potential to offer learners some  
45 space to experiment with questions of identity and learn from that experience.  
46 But in researching how this happens, he highlights the challenges of separating  
47 medium and message, narrative and experience, reality and representation, self  
48 and story. From an organisational standpoint, Shaw (2002: 29) characterises  
49 inquiry processes in organisations as being about ‘thinking in the middle’ in a  
50 paradoxical process of continuity and change. Our respective journeys as  
51 practitioner academics working in health and inquiring and supporting  
52 leadership narratives that travel through the “malestream” leave us wanting to  
53 grapple with these messy, mercurial worlds in this more co-creative fashion.  
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3 In this paper we first outline how we currently practice|research by showing  
4 how we began the creation of this paper, then we link our stories of our work  
5 inquiries to illustrate the interplay of our philosophies and of our subjectivities.  
6 Next we will consider non-collaborative collaboration before questioning  
7 subjectivity in the context of the academy as an example of a large organisation,  
8 as well as generator of what is taken for knowledge. However, these stories and  
9 discussions meander into other sections to show the fluidity and nomadic nature  
10 of our working together. It is our working together which we do not like to  
11 regulate or categorise, we are not claiming a new discipline.

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14 We challenge ourselves to write in a way that reflects the impossibility of  
15 consensus, and we challenge our readers with complexity, dissonance,  
16 disruption and paradox. We write together and we write as individual voices  
17 within this piece. We know it's ambitious, and we know it's different from the  
18 norm.

19  
20 It's not from a sense of belligerently *wanting* to experiment or to push the  
21 boundaries of the mainstream/male stream but rather we're inviting you the  
22 reader to see if any of our reflections speak to your own struggles with voice and  
23 subjectivity. We're attempting to honour our various subjectivities the  
24 reviewers' and the reader's too.

### 25 26 **Making our dilemmas and writing decisions visible**

27  
28 The trouble with subjectivity is its very subjectivity. In relation to qualitative  
29 research we can observe that subjectivities are troublesome and often  
30 irreconcilable. We find that divergence and contingency have to be accepted as  
31 normal; in relation to organisational and research contexts, which often privilege  
32 certainty and consensus, or agreement, irreconcilable subjectivities therefore  
33 pose a fundamental challenge. We three have found we have to agree to disagree,  
34 and we have developed a methodology of non-collaborative collaboration to  
35 ensure that the reflexive subjectivity of each of us is honoured.

### 36 37 **Discovering our voices in the stories of writing this paper**

38  
39 We began this paper by preparing a presentation for the Qualitative Research in  
40 Organisations and Management (QROM) conference in New Mexico 2014. At that  
41 time our conversations seemed to coalesce around our determination to embody  
42 our several subjectivities and we began to inquire about how our hybrid and  
43 shaky selves might find a form that dares to question from the margins while still  
44 being implicated in a system that gives us our living and identity. In our weekly  
45 Skype conversations, it became clear that even as we shared experience of the  
46 struggle of finding voice while taking a deliberately subjective stance, we were  
47 entering into what seemed to be a philosophical dialogue about the nature of  
48 research and about what it means to be the three of us researching individually  
49 and collectively. We gave one another encouragement that doesn't come from a  
50 top-down institutional or paid work context but from our experience of thinking  
51 together in a critically reflexive organic process – built on our shared experience  
52 in taking up our respective professional roles as scholarly practitioners in  
53 healthcare and other leadership contexts. We voiced our subjectivities and we  
54 noticed our differences, in philosophies, approaches, and understandings.  
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3 We three do not share an agreed philosophy, but we are accepting of the range of  
4 philosophies that each of us, and all of us, can embrace in our approach to  
5 research and practice. We do not necessarily agree with one another, in fact we  
6 often don't agree with our (individual) selves from moment to moment!  
7

8 Thus we embrace a plurality of approaches, a proliferation of understandings  
9 and a recognition of multiple possibilities, as essential to help us understand an  
10 increasingly complex working environment, and a milieu where there is *actually*  
11 little agreement about diagnoses, interventions, and outcomes but dominant  
12 discourse(s) assumes that there always *is* agreement. One thing we can agree on  
13 is that, as a result of the above, we all have an acute sensitivity to the operations  
14 of power - that vested interests are often producing pre-determined truths,  
15 which meet the interests of those in power. Or that vested interests are making  
16 life what seems to be easier, but is based on hidden violence.  
17

18 There are three of us writing this paper, but only one of us, the Reluctant, was  
19 able to present at the QROM Conference. Now we reveal, through narrative, how  
20 we dealt with the dilemmas of multiple subjectivities in our preparation and  
21 delivery of a paper, and how this informed the writing.  
22

23 For the conference presentation, I (the Reluctant) was inquiring about the  
24 potential to present knowledge (Heron, 1996) by 'breaking the silence' around  
25 the unseen and the unsayable when it comes to the contradictions and use and  
26 abuse of power and people in organisations. I sensed that we wanted to  
27 acknowledge our different experiences and our own internal power struggles as  
28 expressed in our Skype conversations and as we wrote into the same themes. For  
29 example, I constantly shared my on-going dilemmas around noticing how  
30 organising and managing in organisations is often so reductive and haphazard in  
31 practice. As a consequence, people go to extraordinary lengths to survive in  
32 organisational environments that are often bereft of human connection or a  
33 spirit of hope and kindness.  
34

35 In our conversations, I began to see the potential for how our nomadic post-  
36 structural positioning (Braidotti, 1994) might provide another lens and help  
37 with reframing organisational experience. On later reflection, I wondered if I'd  
38 somehow positioned the Queer and the Reflective as the properly tenured  
39 academics that should provide the relevant theory and expertise. I'd somehow  
40 created a binary where I as the labouring organisational 'Ms Fix it' just had to get  
41 on and survive while the full-time academics should try to make neater sense  
42 and theorise from my experience.  
43

44 The "properly tenured academics", of course, wondered if we had positioned the  
45 Reluctant as the one who properly "knows" through her practice, while we  
46 struggle to express our own doing, as much as our thinking.  
47

48 I, (the Reflective) couldn't go to the conference but crafted a presentation  
49 beforehand which covered what I would have said if I had been the one  
50 presenting on behalf of myself and my colleagues. Of course this was very  
51 different to what the Reluctant actually presented and would have been different  
52 from what the Queer would have done. This reflects our different voices,  
53 struggles and subjectivities. We struggle with who takes the lead; has  
54 dominance; whose ideas are utilised or rejected; whether to make a coherent  
55 whole out of conversations that struggle to articulate meaning, often wondering  
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3 how we maintain collaboration and challenge without two pairing against the  
4 third, for example. These reflect the struggles of working in a wider system such  
5 as the academy or in health care. How do we incorporate our three voices when  
6 we are all different, how do we approach the research and ideas differently  
7 through our own subjectivities? We too have a need for certainty in the midst of  
8 inaction, and we also have our own frailties and sensitivities. We know we need  
9 to acknowledge these.

10  
11 We thus ask, what choices do we have, and what choices do we make, both  
12 individually and as three authors of conference presentations, and papers  
13 submitted?

14  
15 The Reluctant: I enjoyed the opportunity to present a version of our paper at the  
16 conference. But this was no well-polished singular narrative. I rejected The  
17 Reflective's presentation even though it seemed to me to be more attuned to the  
18 norms and conventions expected of academics at an academic conference. Our  
19 agreement – based on trust and mutual respect – was that I should feel free to  
20 appropriate our material and invite conference colleagues to wonder about my  
21 and our subjective stance(s). We have all experienced how such a presentation,  
22 including our articulation of the associated struggles, can be constructed as  
23 deeply troublesome as we complicate the linear, the positivist, and confront  
24 ourselves and our audiences with the responsibility of being in the midst of  
25 (open, still evolving and becoming) systems (Grosz, 2004; Braidotti, 2002) and  
26 sets of relationships that refuse simplistic explanations and require a tolerance  
27 for ambiguity. Immediately after presenting, reflecting in and reflecting on the  
28 experience (Schön, 1983) I emailed my impressions of the conference feed-back  
29 to the others:  
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33 Some people interpreted what I said as us being little more than a support  
34 group. One woman rather stridently wondered why I could not just say  
35 that we were obviously collaborating together. She just could not get our  
36 concept of subjectivities as non-collaborative, collaboration!

37  
38 Another delegate asked to check if she got my meaning. She picked up on  
39 'the violence of organisation' and also wondered if we were illustrating  
40 the violence of the academy. I was invited to think about the extent to  
41 which our paper also spoke to the 'violence of the academy' and whether  
42 in those circumstances we were interested or engaged in constructing a  
43 healing narrative  
44

45 I was also asked if it was possible to write with all these subjectivities and  
46 disjunctures playing out. I said it was a challenge but it was also the  
47 reason why we 'stick at it' together.  
48

49 My main sense is, that for some people, they interpreted our work as that  
50 of some 'young' academics attempting to establish themselves. This is  
51 nothing new as it's just a familiar story of competing for tenure and  
52 recognition. Others may well have dismissed it completely it as it was not  
53 unfamiliar in the worlds of pre-defined research projects and clearly  
54 articulated outcomes. Maybe a few people were left wondering about  
55 their own philosophy and practice of research." (Email 18<sup>th</sup>April2014)  
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3 We include the above story to make very clear that as well as our own  
4 subjectivities, this paper was created through dialogue with others. Indeed we  
5 can also draw attention here to the insight given by one of the reviewers of this  
6 paper, who reminded us that a Foucauldian view would indicate that violence  
7 would also be enacted “in the regulation of subjectivities” (citation required), in a  
8 particularly reflexive turn. Therefore there are even *more than* three  
9 subjectivities herein. Recognising this, we are being unrealistically over-simple  
10 in our title – merely *three* subjectivities? We can understand that the subjectivity  
11 of the conference attendees, the reviewer, the editor and the reader also come  
12 into play. And all of these are potentially regulated, and disciplined. Indeed we  
13 have benefited from the multiple subjectivities of our reviewers through their  
14 comments in the shaping this paper. Is that also a form of ontological violence?  
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17 So what? Isn't this proliferation and braiding of meaning merely complicating  
18 everything unnecessarily? We argue that the impact of these subjectivities, as  
19 well as their suppression and regulation, on our research|practice, is so  
20 significant that we do a disservice to our work, when we elide and regulate  
21 subjectivities, and that we thus do violence in our organisations and in our  
22 research|practice.  
23

24 Too often, this proliferative richness of meaning, and understanding, and insight  
25 is reduced to simple, certain and comfortable propositions through elision of  
26 most of the variety of perspective into the reduction of one particular (and  
27 perhaps dominant) perspective. We consider this a loss, and we consider this  
28 philosophical and ontological violence. The potential diversity and richness is  
29 elided such that some subjectivities are effectively silenced. *This is violence, and*  
30 *nothing is more important in these postmodern times.*  
31  
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33 We posit that there is violence in organisations, violence in the academy,  
34 violence in qualitative research in organisations and management. We don't wish  
35 to replicate these cycles of violence yet again, so let us try to show you, through  
36 narrative, so that you can perceive whether or not you think there is violence at  
37 play.  
38

39 Firstly, then a story from practice, which we will then develop through to a story  
40 of publication in academic journals. As well as containing the complexity we wish  
41 to communicate in this paper, such stories also enable us to recognise our  
42 subjectivities, and ontological nuances in our conversations together. We  
43 consider narrative as something of a protection against ontological violence, as  
44 complexity, contradiction and paradox can be illustrated. So we use stories such  
45 as this all the time (Richardson, 1997; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).  
46

47 *With ten minutes to the start of proceedings, new hospital board members are*  
48 *busily chatting and eyeing up the seating arrangements in an old fashioned, wood*  
49 *panelled boardroom. Public Hospital Board membership may not come with a*  
50 *generous expense account but it offers a mild form of public celebrity for a few*  
51 *members of the party faithful and the occasional positive deviant.*  
52

53 *Their mission is to take on the mantle of governance and make the delivery of*  
54 *cheaper, faster, safer healthcare look like a credible endeavour. This involves laying*  
55 *down the paper trail to evidence quality and patient safety and ensuring that all*  
56 *documentation is filed for the purposes of justification and potential litigation. And*  
57 *in the midst of all the busyness, they must remember to avoid implicating the*  
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3 *Health Minister, the Government and even the medical fraternity no matter what*  
4 *shameful stories and experiences are uncovered. This is all about perpetuating*  
5 *'business as usual' – no matter what the difficulties.*  
6

7 *A renowned academic – the sort beloved of organisations looking for the latest*  
8 *business school fad - is about to present his dumbed down version 'of*  
9 *transformational change for challenging times. He has already promised a non-*  
10 *academic, pragmatic 'Back to basics approach' to change in organisations. So in*  
11 *this atmosphere of tentative introductions and unacknowledged anxiety, the*  
12 *familiar creed of Kotter's eight-step model of change (Kotter 1996) is already*  
13 *flickering and poised to reassure everyone that change is all about mitigating error*  
14 *and following the eight key steps for leading change.*  
15

16 *Rita, the CEO sits half way down the rosewood table and worries that her robust*  
17 *rationale for investing in staff engagement programmes might not be enough to*  
18 *reassure the new Board members that the hospital is of a sound organisational*  
19 *mind and possessed of a credible backbone of transformational intent. The*  
20 *previous day, a local newspaper requested a statement from the new Board around*  
21 *why taxpayers' money was now being wasted on outbreaks of irony and hilarity*  
22 *when it's so obvious that the frontline of health care is being massacred on a daily*  
23 *basis.*  
24

25  
26 *Apparently, the hospital HR Department was launching a new on-line 'Performance*  
27 *Enhancement Framework.' Following the carefully crafted powerpoint*  
28 *presentation, a painstakingly, well-branded CD-Rom, containing the new tool-kit,*  
29 *was to be presented to the sixty hospital staff. The HR Director was 'on message'*  
30 *and as he stressed the importance of 'enhancing clinical and corporate*  
31 *performance in the cut and thrust of delivering acute care.' Then at the call for*  
32 *comments and questions, some smartass prefaced his remarks by wondering if*  
33 *performance enhancement sounded more like a government sponsored health*  
34 *promotion programme designed to offer a lifetime supply of Viagra to all staff! He*  
35 *even suggested that it could even be an added extra on the latest 'Reducing Stress*  
36 *by Building Resilience' initiative. After that the whole event degenerated into*  
37 *sexual innuendo and uproarious laughter.*  
38  
39

40 *Could this be another case of discovering the Emperor's New Clothes of Targets,*  
41 *Business Cases, Toolkits and Timelines had yet again appeared in full colour*  
42 *technical grandeur and magnificence and for once, nobody was capable of taking it*  
43 *too seriously? (The Reluctant: Free fall writing March 14)*  
44

45 This was my roughly hewn attempt – born of frustration and exhaustion - after  
46 listening to more stories that hinted at the levels of incredulity and cynicism,  
47 which are barely below the surface in most organisations. It was juxtaposed with  
48 the image of the expert that was about to provide all the answers for the less  
49 knowledgeable but well-intentioned public interest volunteer. I was poking fun  
50 at the dominance of business jargon and drawing attention to assumptions that  
51 seem to suggest that the latest performance management tool will eliminate all  
52 those negative behaviours and silence the constant mantra of those who trade in  
53 gripes and blame in the canteen and along the corridors.  
54

55  
56 Although the above story is fictional, the actual presentation that provoked the  
57 writing was about being asked to design a staff consultation event for a new  
58 model of performance management. The new framework seemed simple, logical  
59  
60

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3 and utterly devoid of the actual context or any reference to assumptions that  
4 might be at play in that particular organisational culture. The 'bells and whistles'  
5 presentation offered a magic potion would efficiently manage and possibly cure  
6 the negative behavioural challenges that seep into the life of a well-controlled  
7 organisation. More poignantly, the carefully researched model of best practice  
8 was unable to acknowledge other perspectives; most especially the experience of  
9 those who know that structural, rule-bound processes that enforce external  
10 demands are so often at the expense of open conversation and human  
11 connection. Nancy Naples articulates such tensions when she writes about an

12  
13  
14 'irreconcilable tension between the search for a secure place from which  
15 to speak, within which to act and the awareness of the price at which the  
16 secure places are bought, the awareness of the exclusions, the denials and  
17 the blindnesses on which they are predicated' (Naples, 2003:161 citing  
18 Wildavsky (1979).  
19

20 As an experienced organisational development practitioner with a keen interest  
21 in relating an organisation's context and culture to its work, I notice the  
22 exclusions, the denials and the blindness that are best served by the habitual and  
23 the taken for granted assumptions that keep us silenced. Consequently, I wonder  
24 if my bouts of ironic writing are a response to what I experience as a form of  
25 violence when matters of human connection, culture and context go missing  
26 from the dominant organisational narrative. Drawing on feminist research  
27 methods, the concept of 'survivor' narratives (Naples, 2003) was helpful in  
28 repositioning and writing about troubling organisational experiences as a form  
29 of 'speaking truth to power' (Wildavsky, 1979).  
30

31 The concept of an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1989) that refuses to  
32 abstract gender from other dimensions of social identity and diverse contexts  
33 reminded me to avoid abstracting power from other dimensions such as social  
34 status, competition and the dominance of leader discourses that make up the  
35 hidden stories in my experience of working with organisations.  
36

37 From working with organisations seeking to address issues of violence against  
38 women informed by a feminist analysis, I'm familiar with the concept of a  
39 survivor discourse i.e. where knowledge is grounded in personal experience and  
40 emotional pain and is often presented in the form of public witness or the  
41 making of creative artefacts such as poetry and other forms of creative  
42 expression. Naples comments on how the survivor discourse is often contrasted  
43 with an expert discourse that is positioned as being more systematic and  
44 objective in its claims to truth. In reflecting on the development of my standpoint  
45 as an academic practitioner, it was a comfort to position myself as a 'survivor' of  
46 the dominance of technocratic, reductionist thinking in organisations.  
47

48 The Reflective and the Queer, in their own turn, recognise themselves as  
49 survivors too. Survivors in their different subjectivity, having experienced a  
50 different violence, but this much connects us.  
51

52 Mary Jo Hatch et al (2005) characterised the reach of management culture as  
53 greater than any colonial power exercised in the twentieth century and called for  
54 the counterbalancing powers of democracy to reinforce values of ethical  
55 responsibility and freedom among its members (Hatch, et al, 2005:129) As  
56 someone living in and working with organisations in a post-colonial context, I  
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3 began to make connections with how colonial power reaches into how we think  
4 and what we judge as acceptable. It teaches us to dismiss our own opinions as  
5 primitive, uncultured, and lacking in sophistication. Irish people are well  
6 schooled in these processes. We learn to play the game of acquiescence and we  
7 find ways to subvert the system – often for reasons that are critical to our  
8 survival. Such experiences are indeed familiar coping mechanisms in surviving  
9 the dominance of a managerialist culture.  
10

11 Specifically then we can understand the reach of management culture as a  
12 primary mechanism for the articulation and negotiation of power. Qualitative  
13 research with its potential for the recognition of subjectivity is therefore a key  
14 arena for the negotiation of power, in our post-colonial contexts. It's essential  
15 therefore, for us, that suppressed subjectivities are aired, developed and  
16 negotiated.  
17

### 18 **Subjectivity and Intersectionality**

19 One use of intersectionality in this context then, is to foreground and honour  
20 subjective tales. While the Reluctant chose to foreground the story above, the  
21 Reflective and the Queer, had they been presenting at the conference would have  
22 foregrounded another story.  
23

24 That's why the weekly Skype conversations and our fledgling attempts to write  
25 and present our ideas and experience are so important. It's about finding a space  
26 that provides us with some framings and a language that enables us to continue  
27 to survive (and possibly flourish) in organisational contexts that refuse to engage  
28 with subjectivities, struggle and voice. It's about being comfortable with  
29 proliferation. This is not something that we find particularly common in  
30 organisational or academic practice|research contexts. Dissonance and non-  
31 collaboration do not seem to be comfortable for many of us.  
32

33 Even with knowledge of relevant theories and a shared intellectual commitment  
34 to ideas of complexity and responsiveness, our experience has taught us that  
35 day-to-day communicating and so called ordinary intentions are just as likely to  
36 draw one into 'the complications' of voice, unrest, and discomfiting experiences  
37 in organisations. There are not enough stories that tell us that this is normal and  
38 that the gendered workings of power are not just an occasional apparition when  
39 some woman or, more rarely, a man draws it to our attention.  
40

41 We developed our strategy in *writing* this paper together, from our thinking  
42 together, one of us presenting at one particular conference, gaining feedback  
43 from other people, then further thinking together and writing individually and  
44 together throughout. It's really to show that difference and subjectivity can be  
45 celebrated and that we then develop understandings which are richer than  
46 merely one objective (or rather one particular subjective) argument.  
47

48 As we mentioned earlier, of course, more than this, the paper we finally present  
49 to QROM is of course informed by reviewers and an editor, so there are other  
50 voices, other subjectivities and other struggles interwoven.  
51

52 How much do we experience this as violence, as synthesis, or as life-affirming?  
53 We now go on to discuss some of the violences of the academy, but first affirm  
54 the positive potential of academic dialogue, returning again to the conference  
55 involved.  
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3 Intersectionality can also help in our understanding and application of our  
4 ontological underpinnings. This is not a paper with a single explicit theoretical  
5 framework. Instead we are moving through queer theory, feminist theory, post-  
6 colonial theory and other implicit theories, no doubt, which we do not even  
7 name. Our subjectivities, always in the process of being expressed, also imply  
8 multiple and perhaps contingent and unsteady theoretical frameworks.  
9

10 Indeed, we see a plurality of approach, an awareness of intersectionality, a  
11 recognition of multiple possibilities, as essential to help us understand an  
12 increasingly complex working environment, and a milieu where there is indeed  
13 little agreement about diagnoses, interventions, and outcomes. Where we do find  
14 agreement is noticing where power is in operation, and that vested interests are  
15 actually producing the desired pre-determined truths, which actually meet the  
16 interests of whoever is in power.  
17

18 We are thus rather attached to our different voices, struggles and subjectivities,  
19 and ontologies recognising that in a threesome this is *also* problematic: who  
20 takes the lead; has dominance; whose ideas are utilised or rejected; how do we  
21 make a coherent whole out of conversations that struggle to articulate meaning,  
22 how do we maintain collaboration and challenge without two pairing against the  
23 third? These are in essence a microcosm of the struggles of working in a wider  
24 system such as the academy or in health care. How do we incorporate our  
25 various voices when we are all different, approach research and underpinning  
26 ideas differently through our various subjectivities, reconciling our individual  
27 needs for certainty in the midst of inaction, still recognising our own frailties and  
28 sensitivities?  
29

30 Particularly, how much do our *gendered* subjectivities get enacted, and come into  
31 play at this juncture. Just like the boardroom story, above, wouldn't it be entirely  
32 natural for the male in the group to come in here with an answer? Power and  
33 gender are also at play in our research|practice together and separately.  
34

35 So, with just a little slip it could be me, the Queer, presenting Kotter's lovely  
36 staircase, or other certainty, for the client in the Reluctant's story. It could be the  
37 male co-opting the work of female colleagues to the furtherance of his career. So  
38 very often, as a man I am asked or exhorted to perform this very function. I'm a  
39 male academic. I have research targets. I am encouraged to peddle my wares,  
40 demonstrate impact, and translate research into practice. Here I could be, the  
41 male thrusting academic, with mastery of my subject, offering up a simple tool  
42 for you to play with.  
43

44 What the above tale alerts the Queer subjectivity to is the violence against all of  
45 us, and the violence perpetrated by all of us. That subjectivities, always and  
46 already gendered are alive here. As is evidenced above, too often in our research,  
47 inquiry and practice, the answer is to find the man who knows, who can explain,  
48 as the most comforting violence. But in a post-structural feminist take, let's  
49 query this. We will attempt this by opening up the philosophy and subjectivity  
50 playing through our practice|research. We attempt this by silencing the thrusting  
51 male academic at exactly this point, ensuring his withdrawal from intercourse.  
52 We three are all eschewing violence (sadism, and masochism) at this  
53 intersection, and we now recount a story of how all this gets played out in  
54 writing and in the processes of academic publication.  
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### Reflexively turning to the quest for academic publication

Our conference abstract suggested that subjectivity is an important way of questioning power and embodied culture while placing context as a central feature of research. Paradox, tensions and subjectivity, with which we are all comfortable, and indeed use as powerful support to knowledge generation, are often vilified as timewasting, self-absorbed navel-gazing antics that can never produce any significant generalizable and authoritative truth. Moreover we all have encountered a perception of philosophy as “all that theory” being somehow a barrier to REAL research when we attempt to critically reflect on the meaning, purpose or validity of our research|practice.

For me, the Reflective, this means in practice that our embodied subjectivities our reaching consensus and as a nurse I find this lack of obvious action and certainty unsettling. I was trained in pragmatism after all, with assessment skills so embedded in my practice, that I seek interpretation and connections everywhere. Our embodied struggles add to our understanding of ambiguity, difference and critical understanding as we work in our respective organisations. These struggles provide a richness and paradox to our inquiries that is both hopeful and challenging. The diversity and challenge is a struggle to work with, both in my organisation and in our collaborations, which we carry out in our own time.

We know that in understanding our experience as a struggle it's easy to slip into negative, over-critical judgments. However, we all feel negative at some time working in our organisations: not feeling our work is understood, or appreciated by our colleagues and managers. This is a common refrain in health and social care, higher education and public service more broadly. Therefore, as we write about our subjectivity and develop our awareness of the potential for violence it begs the question: how do we sustain a hopeful struggle that does not sink into the victimhood and defeatist attitudes in the face of the dominant discourse?

We are arguing that this is never as simple as presenting a vigorous, clear, well-argued and rational critique, or an objective, clearly articulated summary of our agreed position, thereby merely acting as a mirror to the dominant. Thus we would replicate violence. We are modestly (we hope) trying to present our subjective experiences of engagement in practice|research in a way which opens up avenues for discussion, and proliferates understanding.

### Philosophical violence in the academy

We now narrate a tale of a struggle to get a paper published about using poetry with nurses. The story highlights the resilience required in the face of comments, which are critical, in the many understandings of that term. Furthermore, the significant learning for us as researchers|practitioners coming into the writing world later in life with our own more-established subjectivity and identities, is to not personalise the feedback but remain open to the challenge, to show subjectivity without further propagating violence.

The Reflective continues:

*I am on my third journal and sixth version of the paper about how I used poetry in a critically reflexive action research inquiry. In the paper I questioned traditional linear versions of published research. I was struck by the irony when the feedback*

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3 from the journal said could I please re-submit the paper under the following  
4 headings: Aims, Research Question, Methodology and Design, Findings/Results/  
5 Discussion and Recommendations. Was it a discussion paper? No – then it must be  
6 research and so had to have those headings! In my opinion it was both – but where  
7 is the space for that? Thus, I am reminded of a Wittgenstein quote from  
8 *Philosophical Investigations*, cited in Bourdieu:

10 How am I able to follow a rule? – if this is not a question about causes, then  
11 it is about the justification of following a rule in the way I do. If I have  
12 exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned.  
13 Then I am inclined to say: 'This is simply what I do.' (Bourdieu, 1990: 25)

14  
15 Returning to the paper I made some changes, asked a colleague to read it, re-wrote  
16 it twice (but my paper was still not following the traditional style) and tried a  
17 different journal. This time the paper was accepted but with a large number of  
18 major changes. I was advised to look at theories in linguistic discourse especially  
19 the use of metaphor and poetry; I had made assumptions about a collaborative  
20 inquiry process that I had used; why had I used three strands to the inquiry as this  
21 was complicated, ambiguous and confusing? I had managed to convey this in my  
22 thesis effectively without any changes so I was particularly flummoxed by that  
23 comment. I should be less tentative in my approach, more confident in my claims;  
24 what were the benefits for the nurses in using poetry; I needed to show what I had  
25 done rather than question the traditional approach to research – most of these  
26 comments were helpful. As I continued working on the paper I found I had lost the  
27 argument about linear approaches to research. There was a word count and I  
28 needed to trim the extraneous argument away and keep to the core message 'using  
29 poetry with nurses as a co-inquiry process seemed to engender empathy'. There  
30 you go again, 'seemed to': why are you so tentative and not forceful with your line  
31 of argument?  
32  
33  
34

35 Then the *Queer* saw a special call for action research in healthcare. This journal  
36 had published poetry before, valued multiple ways of knowing and encouraged new  
37 and fledgling writers. My paper was accepted with five points to address. The  
38 feedback indicated it was well crafted with a thought provoking contribution. The  
39 areas for improvement were mostly helpful: it would help to provide clearer aims  
40 and objectives for the research. This was not quite so easy to address, as it was an  
41 emerging nonlinear research process, but I could give it a go. I reflected on how  
42 challenging it is for researchers, using iterative and emerging designs, to create or  
43 establish clear objectives in the midst of practice.  
44

45 The feedback asked me to show why poetry is particularly relevant or appropriate  
46 as an intervention tool in the healthcare sector rather than any other (hang on, I  
47 am not claiming that at all, I have no way of knowing that and the word 'tool'  
48 always antagonises me). The paper would benefit from explicit positioning in the  
49 dialogic/linguistic traditions of action research - but this isn't my field. I positioned  
50 my work using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and field albeit probably not very  
51 well as the second reviewer had said.  
52  
53

54 I made the changes, and a report of how I had addressed the comments. It was a  
55 struggle to keep to the word limit but as a nurse I mostly follow the rules, and  
56 managed it. I knew I hadn't addressed Bourdieu's concepts as well as I could if I had  
57 had more words but something had to give. The paper was better than before; I  
58  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 was pleased with it and I expected it to be published. The comments came back; yes  
4 it's better but not publishable in its current form. This time, the first reviewer has  
5 made 20 suggestions for improvement including referring to the piece as having  
6 linguistic sloppiness with areas where the text is poorly written.  
7

8 However it's not all bad - there is some hope. The second reviewer tells me it is a  
9 very well-written manuscript with a really interesting contribution to the action  
10 research field and healthcare sector. I ask myself: is it possible to be both sloppy  
11 and well-written? And I realise I have returned to dualistic thinking. Of course it is.  
12 I still haven't integrated Bourdieu's concepts as well as I could (yes that's fair  
13 comment). Then, the special editor tells me the paper would benefit from: a section  
14 on the purpose and the research questions (that's in the introductory paragraph, so  
15 I don't understand this), then a section on Research Design and Methods (I've  
16 addressed this as well but used a different title), then Analysis and Results (ah, ...  
17 the usual linear approach!).  
18  
19

20 I feel angry and deflated by the dominant discourse which is trying to force me  
21 down a traditional route once again.  
22

23 In our next Skype conversation I talk about how deflated I am and the Reluctant  
24 reminds me of a Tony Benn quote about two ways to control people: create a  
25 culture of fear and de-moralise them. I certainly feel demoralised. I have never  
26 claimed to be a linguist. I don't particularly want to make strong claims about  
27 poetry as an intervention tool. I don't believe in authoritative truth. But I feel  
28 like I am being driven into providing certainty - "Use poetry - it's great - it  
29 makes people cry and then they feel a whole lot better! The crying gives them  
30 empathy for others." Somehow I seem to have stumbled across the invisible  
31 electric fence of the publishing/academic world that keeps giving me shocks. I  
32 am a practitioner academic - I straddle both camps - am I only flirting with the  
33 academy?  
34  
35

### 36 **Reflexively returning to this paper**

37 Here, then, in a paper on subjectivity, offered up to the journal, *Qualitative*  
38 *Research in Organisations and Management*, we have offered tales with holes in  
39 them - incomplete and incoherent tales - to subvert our own assumptions and  
40 those of the reader. The discursive freedom within any of our research|practice  
41 roles is limited, and determines who we can be, as a subject, of course; and in a  
42 Foucauldian analysis, the options for resistance are limited, but by drawing  
43 attention to our located and determined subjectivities we hope to trouble  
44 ourselves and the academy.  
45

46 We wish to draw attention to the undiscussable violence of research|practice.  
47 We argue that qualitative research is necessarily subjective, and by eliding the  
48 subjectivity from our approaches we inflict real violence on ourselves, our  
49 subjects, and even others distant from the research.  
50

51 We relate our subjective survival narratives, as healing narratives for ourselves  
52 of course, yet also as illuminatory, in terms of the weaving and play of  
53 philosophy in our practice|research, our experience of  
54 submission|surrender|survival and their relationship to violence. Violence in  
55 research|practice, violence in practice and violence in the academy. Our  
56 understanding of our research|practice is indeed personal, survival-oriented,  
57  
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3 narrative, and subjective – we thus re-articulate the concept that the personal is  
4 political.

5  
6 We would add to this that we can consciously use and subvert the form, content  
7 and style of our subjectivity towards political and communicative ends.

8  
9 It is fundamentally necessary to draw attention to the way that our  
10 thinking is always and already determined by otherwise unexamined  
11 assumptions. “What is feminist, or perhaps, more recently, queer, is  
12 that which performs its own parody, its own excesses” (Grosz, 1995:  
13 17)

14  
15 So we acknowledge our own identities, our own parodies and our own excesses.

16  
17 In this paper, as well as the accounts written by the two women, there is also an  
18 authorial voice which is the ‘other’; queer man. Serendipitously a subjective  
19 narrative doesn’t appear. Is this because men remain invisible in subjective  
20 work, or are we performing the abstraction and use of women’s experience  
21 under the gaze of the man? Perhaps we are self-consciously enacting gendered  
22 violence, and can never escape it. To draw attention to the subjectivities of men  
23 as well as women in the academy is a dangerous pastime. We discuss this in our  
24 Skype calls sometimes.

25  
26 Here we offer the possibility that the man is less visible in this submission,  
27 because we are enacting a submission of man to woman, and a privileging of the  
28 woman rather than male dominance. Or is the male merely hidden but still  
29 powerful. By eliding the male subjectivity (which is often dressed up as  
30 objectivity) are we furthering insight or not?

31  
32 We are instead, self-consciously, offering a set of uncertain, weak, dis-articulated,  
33 subjective and philosophical speculations on our own research|practice.

34  
35 For most people in the real world uncertainty is taken as a sign of  
36 weakness. Which has devastating effects on those who try it, unless  
37 they already have high status.(...) But – this is the argument – one  
38 possibility is for those who are told as privileged to perform their  
39 multidiscursive writing as weak, inconclusive and limited, in the hope  
40 that this will make it easier for those who are less privileged in turn to  
41 perform their writing as orderings rather than orders.(Law, 1994: 191-  
42 192)

43  
44 In our own work together, at any one time, and in this paper, in this suite of  
45 narratives, who knows who is exploiting whom? Who is privileged? Who is the  
46 subaltern? Because we are white and relatively wealthy, but also female, queer,  
47 colonised, reluctant and thus abject, we don’t know whether we are privileged or  
48 not. We suspect we are, with our aspirational academic lives, and therefore we  
49 attempt *this* writing as a narrative of failure as much as success. A narrative of  
50 critical failure, or a refusal to take up the norm of the research paper or the  
51 perfect form of the heroic narrative.

52  
53 We feel that as privileged academics and particularly those researching  
54 organisations and management we MUST advocate for subjective non-  
55 consensual, contradictory approaches. If we, who are privileged and who  
56 understand intersectionality, feminism and post-modernism to some degree, end  
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3 up merely replicating the violence of the academy, then we (re-)inflict violence  
4 on ourselves and most importantly on those who truly have no voice within  
5 organisations.  
6

7 In terms of materiality, then, it is essential in *this* text to foreground and perform  
8 our own subjectivity, however que(e)ried and performed to excess. We reveal  
9 our frailty, and our violence, we also attempt to play with our own accounts and  
10 our own identities, confusing male and female, and revealing and hiding a phallic  
11 voice in this writing. We wish to draw attention to the violence of masculist and  
12 autocratic tendencies and accept that all of us, including the Queer, are complicit,  
13 and that all researchers|practitioners are complicit with violence either  
14 intentionally or unintentionally to others.  
15

16 We suggest that there is usually a patronising, deficit model, and it's a gendered  
17 model, often at work in narratives around subjectivity in organisational  
18 practice|research. In daily research|practice there is barely a week goes by when  
19 the Queer does not notice the normal of professors appending their name to  
20 research and publications which they did not create; the normal of male  
21 academics being "paid to think" while women actually do the work; the normal  
22 of women's experience being co-opted and scrutinised and 'othered' and thus  
23 worthy of research and inquiry.  
24  
25

26 In the above stories, we have more experience of the women in our  
27 trium(vir!)jate: is this the powerful admitting and self-consciously indulging in  
28 appropriate violence towards himself, and emasculation to allow space for the  
29 subaltern? The patriarchy, an objectivity which is also a performance, a  
30 narrative, and most importantly, a subjectivity, is sometimes overwhelming,  
31 particularly when dressed up as the truth.  
32  
33

### 34 **Conclusion**

35 We are arguing that within the academy and in organising there is a governing  
36 narrative to the role of the academic which is comforting, yet crushing. When we  
37 try to introduce some questioning, querying and troubling from a reluctant  
38 viewpoint, a reflective viewpoint, or a queer viewpoint, then we are truly  
39 problematizing qualitative research in, on, around and through organisations.  
40 This becomes a problem for all of us, and for our subjectivity: how do we  
41 maintain our values when our subjectivity is seduced by our own desire for  
42 dominance and potentiality, and succumbs to our own violence? With our  
43 postmodern subjectivities, we sometimes fear complete invisibility,  
44 inauthenticity, the impossibility of our subjective and contingent philosophical  
45 position(s). We also fear a response that regards us as emotional, not rational, a  
46 support group and therefore dismissible.  
47  
48

49 A further struggle and tension is the inevitability of not always incorporating all  
50 our ideas equally. The Reflective struggles with this by sometimes feeling  
51 insecure if her ideas are not incorporated. On an intellectual level she sees our  
52 differences in experiences, understanding and knowledge of academic literature  
53 creates our unique subjectivity but emotionally this difference can sometimes  
54 feel like a personal attack, two against one, or all of us differing completely and a  
55 lack of achievement to complete our work.  
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3 The Queer struggles with a lifetime's experience of being 'other', yet privileged,  
4 knowing that something was different from an early age, and yet still finding it  
5 difficult to advocate over and against difference without being overwhelmed by  
6 his own emotional response.  
7

8 However, we challenge each other and remain vigilant to our own weakness and  
9 blind spots which can get played out during our reflexive conversations.  
10

11 We write into each other's texts, then withdraw gracefully or petulantly; two of  
12 us reach agreement and the third becomes strangely silent; we write three  
13 accounts, and then our fear of incoherence defeats us and the paper moves no  
14 further forward. We persevere and encourage one another to accept the  
15 dissonance, incoherence and sometimes ugliness of our text, for these are our  
16 stories, however disarticulated. We have to accept that our failure is inevitable  
17 herein, but it's not comfortable for any of us.  
18

19 All our stories are borne of critically reflexive subjectivities and represent the  
20 lived experience of struggling to voice stories from what feels like the margins of  
21 dominant theories in organisation studies and the norms that emanate from a  
22 business school education or even the more qualitative research paradigm. We  
23 listen to the rhetoric of education design and practices that support leaders,  
24 produce leaders and managers that are more cognisant of supposed new  
25 paradigms such as the new 'triple bottom lines' of people, planet and profit and  
26 often we're full of fear and despair. The violence of each makes us struggle, but  
27 the violence of *three* linear demands is overwhelming. The fantasy of three  
28 measurable objectivities is crushing to *all* of our subjectivities.  
29  
30

31 We hope we have presented ourselves as contradictory as much as cohesive, as  
32 open as much as closed, as potential as much as history, sometimes incomplete,  
33 and incoherent. And academics, practitioners, researchers are not supposed to  
34 be like that. But if qualitative research, which could be seen as always already  
35 subjective, merely reverts to the patterns of consensus and certainty, seeking  
36 clarity, collaboration and objectivity then we are doubly implicated and doubly  
37 guilty of colluding in that philosophical violence.  
38

39 We have acknowledged that our own subjectivities/surrender/survival can be  
40 experienced as deeply troublesome as we complicate linear, positivist consensus.  
41 This confronts us with the responsibility of being in the midst of systems and  
42 sets of relationships that refuse simplistic explanations and require a tolerance  
43 for ambiguity and critical reflexivity. As in the Reflexive's account of her journey  
44 towards publication we are often struck by multiple ironies in our reflexivity  
45 (Corlett, 2013) – and when we are *collaboratively* struck, then we both feel  
46 validated, but also somewhat intimidated with these insights gained through  
47 recognising our multiple and non-collaborative subjectivities. We are thus  
48 hesitant about any claim to authority or truth. We have seen the damage that  
49 such totalising and demotic claims to truth can make. We cannot avoid making a  
50 claim to our *voices* in the world, but we can disassociate ourselves from any  
51 reified truth claims or from anything that smacks of authority.  
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55 The writing of this paper has been a challenge, and we surmise that the reading  
56 of it has been a challenge, too, but we hope a worthwhile one. For ourselves,  
57 writing into the somewhat rigid demands of a journal paper, including the  
58 structured abstract, has been a profound challenge to our heartfelt subjective  
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3 desires to communicate our lived truths. We could, and will at another time,  
4 draw on queer theory, post-colonial theory and no doubt others to help us  
5 understand but for the moment we choose an extended quote from a feminist  
6 source:  
7

8 Feminist research undoubtedly has radical potential for negotiating  
9 alliances across profound differences, for listening to experience of  
10 'othering' for addressing the effects of privilege and identifying the  
11 situatedness and politics of any research process. The point of  
12 investigating gendered lives across difference is still to establish the best  
13 possible stories of diverse gendered social realities. Political  
14 transformation requires being able to judge between competing  
15 knowledge claims and being able to locate the exercise of power in the  
16 production of knowledge. (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002:120)  
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18  
19 We fundamentally believe that being able to judge between, does not mean then  
20 choosing the single theoretical framework, the single narrative or the mutually  
21 agreed consensus to govern our research|practice, as that merely replicates the  
22 violence of power. For us, being able to judge between knowledge claims  
23 necessitates the preservation of multiple and contradictory subjectivities  
24 wherein the fluidity of experiences and knowledges remains alive. We have to  
25 embrace our diverse, messy, contradictory and sometimes incoherent  
26 subjectivities in our production of knowledge.  
27

28 We suggest that this account of our practice|research can be conceptualised as a  
29 submission or surrender narrative or a hopeful narrative. By offering up  
30 incomplete and fragmentary text we hope this might be considered as a  
31 surrender to the reader, to the dominant, and comfortable with its own  
32 incompleteness and unknowing. We have no idea what you will make of this;  
33 and that's fine. We hope to continue a conversation with you too, a non-  
34 collaborative collaboration. It may be a struggle at times, and it's languishing in  
35 subjectivity, but this text has our authentic voices, troubled though they may be.  
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38 We hope it may also support yours.  
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