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Performing feminist research: creative tactics for communicating COVID-19, gender, and higher education research

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ABSTRACT

Presenting research findings outside of the form of a traditional research report requires different modes of making and communicating. This paper offers an account of how *The #FEAS Report*, a satirical news video, was made to communicate the findings from interviews and a survey as part of the mixed-methods study, *Sexism, Higher Education, and COVID-19: The Australian Perspective* to a wider public. Three creative tactics for research communication were used: *DIY aesthetics*, *humour*, and *situated bodies*. These communication tactics enabled the researchers to think differently about what research findings mean, and how to articulate them in ways that are intelligible. The paper shows how these tactics worked to bring findings to audiences beyond the academy and ask audiences within the academy to think differently about research reporting and knowledge communication. The paper considers how performing research in this way generates different conversations that compliment those started by more common ways of presenting research findings, and most importantly, how crucial it is for feminist researchers to make space for the creative within contemporary higher education.

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Introduction

This paper considers how feminist creative research communication tactics can bring research findings to audiences beyond the academy, and asks audiences within the academy to think differently about what counts as research reporting and knowledge communication. The subject of the paper is *The #FEAS Report*, a 13.35 min satirical

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news video based on findings from interviews and a survey that was part of a mixed-methods research project entitled *Sexism, Higher Education, and COVID-19: The Australian Perspective*. The project's aim was to develop understanding of the gendered experiences of academic workers in Australia during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As a team, we are interested in how creative research communication techniques have the potential to generate different kinds of conversations, both within and outside of the academy. Therefore, as well as writing the research into 'traditional' outputs such as journal articles and professional blog posts (see, for example Gray et al. 2022, a and b), the research team worked together to turn survey findings into *The #FEAS Report* which followed the format of a news programme delivered from a central news desk with sport, weather and traffic reports performed on location by three members of the team. This paper draws upon these 'news items' to demonstrate how they were developed as creative tactics for data analysis that intervene, overturn, and displace traditional forms of hegemonic data presentation, and contribute to new approaches to reporting and communicating research findings and results.

Also under discussion in the paper is #FEAS, the Australian-based, international and transdisciplinary feminist collective Feminist Educators Against Sexism. *The #FEAS Report* is one manifestation of an ongoing collaboration between feminist researchers and professional performers and creatives that is part of the broader project of #FEAS. #FEAS was founded in 2016 and is co-led by three of the authors of this paper, Mindy Blaise, Emily Gray and Jo Pollitt. #FEAS are committed to developing creative interventions into structural and everyday sexism in the academy and other places and uses a mix of humour, irreverence, and collective action to interrupt and disarm both institutional and everyday sexism. We prefer the term 'sexisms' as opposed to 'sexism' because it allows for a nuanced reading of gender-based discrimination acknowledging that people who identify as women as well as gender diverse people, experience sexism differently, and that race, class and disability also shape gendered experiences of sexism (Gray, Knight, and Blaise 2018). The creative interventions that #FEAS have developed and performed, attempt to generate a kind of consciousness raising for our times that is responsive, affirmative, experimental, generative, and insistent. These creative interventions are situated within a feminist methodology that challenges the hierarchies and binary logics that (re)produce gender norms, stereotypes, and inequities. #FEAS creative interventions are also designed to interrupt some of the taken-for-granted norms and ways of carrying out and reporting upon research and develop innovative approaches to communicate and present research findings to audiences within and beyond the academy. This paper demonstrates how working both within and against foundational knowledge making and communicating practices makes it possible to move ideas about structural and everyday sexism outside of the academy and into public spaces to create awareness and change.

Throughout the paper, we draw upon feminist and queer feminist theories to illustrate how we are enabled to persist in subverting the neoliberal, masculinist techniques that shape academic work in contemporary times. Margaret Sims (2020) uses the term 'excessive managerialism' (82) to describe the multiple ways in which the autonomy of academics is undermined by institutions that seek to weigh and measure every moment of an academic worker's time. *The #FEAS Report* deliberately places our (queer, middle-ageing, white) bodies into the frame in our performances as 'news reporters' in order

to offer research communication that ‘resonates and conveys beyond the signficatory, incorporating and leveraging various excesses’ (Lippman 2022, 183). This means that we situate our lived excesses as intimately entangled with the data in a process of transmission where, as sociologist Kat Jungnickel suggests the ‘what and the how (as well as the where and the why) are understood as intimately tied’ (Jungnickel 2020, 2). The use of irony in delivering the findings directly implicates the ‘reporter’ within the data which creates the opportunity for audiences to engage with difficult content and potentially recognize their own bodies as an important and visible part of the (news) story. In an act of double embodiment, the three reporters simultaneously objectify the research by delivering it in the third person from a conventionally ‘impartial’ news desk *and* embody the findings through their very presence.

Performing our research in this way also allows us to draw attention to the hierarchies of knowledge that shape the contemporary university, where traditionally male-dominated discipline areas, such as STEM subjects, are afforded higher value because of the research income they are able to generate and the social value that particular kinds of science enjoy (Casad et al. 2018). This means that what ‘counts’ as productive and useful within the contemporary university is attached to rankings, incessantly measuring h-indexes and field-weighted citations, and is connected to the tangible and institutionally intelligible. By creating *The #FEAS Report*, we offer a challenge to traditional notions of research collaboration, usefulness and productivity. We therefore set out to queer the conceptions of time that dominate the academy and follow Jack Halberstam (2005) to do this. Halberstam understands queer time as working in opposition to the normative and developing ‘according to other logics of location, movement, and identification’ (1). *The #FEAS Report* also attempts to decolonize what counts as output within the contemporary university, because universities, as Geonpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2004) reminds us, are based on white, Cartesian ways of knowing. In Australia, universities are built on unceded Aboriginal land, which means that other ways of knowing, being and doing, particularly those that are Indigenous and feminist, are subjugated (Moreton-Robinson 2004). In addition to this,

Overwhelming demands on time, a lack of care, and a disregard for the quirky and creative mean that those who sit outside of neoliberal subjecthood within the academy often find themselves exhausted, out of time and feeling literally used up by the neoliberal academic machine (Gray, Pollitt, and Blaise 2021, 5).

It is, therefore, important that those of us who exist on the margins force open spaces in the academy within which we can breathe. This struggle to breathe is part of queer struggles (Ahmed 2010), feminist work (Gannon et al. 2019) and part of our commitment to listen with respect to Indigenous colleagues and communities (Indigenous Action, 2014). *The #FEAS Report* is an illustration of our commitment to think and do differently within the contemporary university, making our own bodies visible and vulnerable through the immediacy of performance, and by doing so, to build feminist communities within which no-one is left behind.

From here, the paper introduces some of the key findings from the research that informed *The #FEAS Report*. We do this in order to illustrate the empirical foundations of this work and because these findings offer an important contribution to the field with respect to the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in academia. The

paper then nods to the lineage of feminist performance and how these works individually and collectively challenge patriarchal structures by centring feminist voices. Next, we outline the key creative tactics we used to write, develop and make *The #FEAS Report* video and here we illustrate how humour is used as a deliberate strategy in comedy to invite the audience in and allow for a different kind of engagement with feminist research that juxtaposes 'serious' academic findings with comically overly earnest 'live' performances. The paper concludes with a series of vignettes drawn from the sport, weather and traffic reports that are featured in *The #FEAS Report* to illustrate the creative tactics in action. Throughout this section, we show how these creative tactics intervene, overturn, and displace the traditional form of hegemonic data presentation and contribute towards new approaches to reporting and communicating research findings and results.

Survey research and serious humour

We acknowledge that the research we conducted has serious and disturbing findings and contributes to feminist work that is being carried out during the COVID-19 era. This body of work highlights the raced, classed, and gendered impacts of COVID-19, where 'it became visible that women, especially women of colour in paid and domestic carework and key worker roles, were keeping the system running' (Swan 2020, no page). Research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has also demonstrated that women were more likely to have experienced its adverse effects on their mental health and wellbeing, particularly during related periods of lockdown (Ausin et al. 2021; Cyzmara, Langenkamp, and Cano 2020; Yan et al. 2020). Our own research found that there was a consistency of experiences across the sector, and that woman-identifying academic workers within Australian higher education were doing the majority of the care work at home, in the community and at work (Gray et al. 2022). Therefore, pre-existing gender-based inequalities within the academy were amplified by the pandemic, and continued to be experienced differently by minority academic workers including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and LGBTIQ+ people.

Our mixed-methods research was conducted during the early stages of the pandemic, where most states in Australia had some form of lockdown and varying degrees of COVID-19-associated regulations such as mask wearing, social distancing and limits on public and private gatherings. Our survey showed that women-identifying participants articulated how working from home during lockdowns was complicated by childcare and homeschooling responsibilities. Nearly half of the participating cohort reported an increase in their caring responsibilities ($n = 88$, 49.7%) and almost a third reported 'feeling overburdened by domestic duties for others' ($n = 55$; 31.1%) (Gray et al. 2022, 4). While male-identifying academics participated in comparatively small numbers overall, it is notable that just 9.1% of this cohort reported feeling overburdened by domestic duties, as compared to 32.1% of the female participants. A sizable group of participants reported that their domestic challenges were heightened by the worsening of their chronic health conditions over this period ($n = 56$; 31.6%) (Gray et al. 2022, 5). The quantitative component of the survey informed the development of the first part of *The #FEAS Report*, which was staged in a faux newsroom and where three of the authors performed as 'news anchors' who summarized these findings.

Our survey also contained a significant qualitative component, and we asked participants to articulate their experiences relating to COVID-19, sexism and their university's response to the pandemic. It is in response to this qualitative data that we developed the sport, traffic, and weather reports and which became the focus of the reporting. Whilst certainly not funny in and of itself, using humour as a knowledge transmission tactic allows us to 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway 2016), and to engage with that which disturbs us differently. Humour means that we can 'make messages more palatable for audiences without detracting from the seriousness of those messages' (Branagan 2007, 472). Most importantly perhaps, humour shapes #FEAS work and contributes to our challenge to neoliberal, masculinist framings of what 'counts' in higher education. Ironically, whilst feminism has a long history of using humour, feminists are still often understood to be man-hating, humourless (and therefore) lesbians (Ahmed 2015; Bocher et al. 2020; Kember 2015). By performing research through creative tactics of DIY humour, *The #FEAS Report* subverts both the notion that feminists can't be funny and the (re)presentation of the 'serious' academic. The choice of news broadcast video also offered a different kind of communication of data amid the daily news updates and increased 'doomscrolling' during COVID lockdowns.

Performing research

There is a long history of feminist performance that #FEAS draw from. Within the academic sphere for example, Heather McLean performs as drag king alter-ego Toby Sharp as a way to creatively critique 'the race and gender politics of exclusionary arts-led revitalisation' in Toronto, Canada (McLean 2017, 39). Australian feminist performers and groups such as Julie-Anne Long, Barbara Cleveland, and The Rabble all use creative tactics to bring attention to and make visible difficult content by including their bodies in subversive ways; Long by inhabiting the persona of a cleaner 'Val' (2017) and performing everyday acts in a public gallery space to raise awareness of invisibility and value of middle-aged women; Barbara Cleveland through their video 'The One Hour laugh' (2009) parodies the seriousness of performance art through joyful (and tedious) intervention of sustained laughing out loud; and The Rabble unapologetically centre feminist voices to replace and repopulate male-dominated scripts and stories to provoke and propel conversations about difficult and complex topics.

Since 2016, #FEAS have enacted creative interventions and utilized various creative tactics as attempts to interrupt and question the status quo of a hegemonic, masculinist, and neoliberal academy. In 2020, #FEAS began experimenting with video as a way to creatively communicate research findings, as depicted in Figure 1. #FEAS' first attempt at using film to share research findings was a 4.45 min short video, *Performing Project P: The official unboxing* (Blaise, Gray, and Pollitt 2020) which featured a live 'opening' of envelopes containing original zines made as part of three international Zoom zine-making workshops (Pollitt, Blaise, and Gray 2021) that were run at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020. Entitled *#FEAS Project P*; the zine-making project encouraged feminist academics to think differently about productive uses of time during the pandemic, and to make space within which to come together virtually to create a zine on the feminist topics of the personal, political and practical. The workshops were instigated to put a deliberate 'pause' on pandemic-related issues.



Figure 1. Still image from Performing Project P: The official unboxing.

Workshop participants created zines and posted them inter/nationally to Australia. The unboxing video functions as a subversive morning TV infomercial that enacts a pause, or a break in the continuum of the hegemonic program of the 'lockdown' day. It also presents the findings of this creative Zoom zine-making research project in a form that sits outside of a traditional written research report.

This short video can then be considered a forerunner to *The #FEAS Report*, as it gave the team a chance to experiment with film, performance and working together as experts and novices, academics and performers.

Creative tactics: DIY aesthetics, humour, and situated bodies

The #FEAS Report is a creative intervention that furthers #FEAS experimentations with film as a creative knowledge communication tactic in the form of a 13.35-min video. The video features survey data collected from Gray et al.'s (2022) study on gender, sexism, and COVID-19 in Australian universities in script form. It deploys the structure of the well-established and familiar medium of a televised news report to subvert the traditional way both news and research findings are delivered. Working with the genre of live news reporting enables research findings to be shared in an immediate and tangibly visceral way which gives a sense of urgency to the findings. This sense of immediacy is further framed by employing analogies of sport, weather, and traffic to impart the ongoing sense of the speed/interruption/delay and everydayness of the inequalities that were amplified by COVID-19. *The #FEAS Report* as a creative intervention works both within research traditions (by developing and conducting a survey) and against how research findings are often (and within the neoliberal university preferably) presented, in the form of a written research report.

Lather (2013) calls for 'a convergence of practices of intensity and emergence, [since] both practice and objects of a field are redefined and reconfigured' (640) in

reconfiguring the status quo. *The #FEAS Report* does this by presenting the ‘facts’ of the research in a funny, ironic, and satirical way rather than using ‘rich and thick descriptions’ to set the scene or to tell it like it is (Lather and St. Pierre 2013). This way of reporting findings challenges who the ‘reader’ or consumer of the findings are, and this, in itself, holds promise for collective and creative actions. We will now outline in detail the three creative tactics used and featured in *The #FEAS Report*: DIY aesthetics, humour, and situated bodies.

DIY aesthetics

Using DIY aesthetics as a creative tactic is a hallmark of #FEAS work to date and features in *The #FEAS Report* in numerous ways. Most obviously is the use of DIY props such as a poster of Australia divided into Indigenous place names attached to a whiteboard, oversized hand-written palm cards, photocopied pie charts, whistles, and toy binoculars. These props gesture towards a time when newscasts were reported from local stations sans the chroma key backgrounds and computerized data of today. DIY aesthetics were also emphasized in production and editing techniques with low-tech visual, set, and sound solutions employed to convey complexity of data. As each of the scenes was filmed as continuous one-shot pieces to camera, the thematic divisions of each segment were achieved in post-production through sequencing and split screen presenting, including overlaying graphics of data and still images of an empty Olympic stadium and kitchen sink. The use of jump cuts, generic visual overlays, graphics and musak sound were intentionally chosen to not only mimic live news reporting, but to amplify the kitsch overproduction of commercial news broadcasts. The use of ‘analog TV grain’ and ‘VHS timecode’ overlays on the high-resolution footage evokes a visual metaphor of ‘constantly tuning in’ and simultaneously creates a subtle tension between what is live and what is pre-recorded. A constructed liveness is further amplified through comically editing sequences where the anchor desk throws to field reporter segments, who have magically moved from the anchor desk to a roadside traffic report in one seamless frame. Editing helped to make these transitions appear ‘normal’, whilst simultaneously creating room for the humour and absurdity of the deadpan continuum of the performers’ delivery. These DIY aesthetics were amplified by featuring the researchers themselves as performers. With Mindy and Emily both untrained performers, Jo’s practice of performance improvisation came into play. On-the-fly directorial decisions were made in response to the limitations of each location via the real-time composition of performers and props, and a sense of responsive ‘liveness’ and lived experience was heightened.

Using DIY aesthetics also allowed us to show the behind-the-scenes academic bodies that produce research by having them act as news anchors. This was a deliberate choice and the hand-made props act to counter traditional research reporting, that, ‘when findings reach publics, arguments appear polished, with much of the ambiguity and mess tidied up or erased’ (Jungnickel 2020, 10). *The #FEAS Report* is aesthetically unkempt, and by using members of the research team as performers sans ‘hair and makeup’ and living in bodies that remember sexism, homophobia and misgenderings, this places some of the messiness of the ‘behind the scenes’ of research front and centre to the piece.

Humour

Humour is used as a vital and generative tactic that destabilizes traditional modes of reporting and invites viewers to consider difficult material. Our use of humour in *The #FEAS Report* was a deliberate tactic that had several functions. First, as our work moves between the academy and the public sphere, humour offers us a creative way to perform to non-academic audiences, a way of presenting research findings about gender and academic work to communicate with a wider public. It also provokes audiences within the academy to engage differently with notions of productivity, engagement, and output. Our use of humour further functions to disarm the audience, as feminists (and particularly academic feminists) have been historically, socially and culturally positioned as humourless (Ahmed 2015), and so by deploying humour as a knowledge translation tactic, we are able to speak back to the lateral violence inherent in denying groups of people (feminists, lesbians) a sense of humour, especially in contexts such as Australia, where a sense of humour is seen as a positive personality trait (Leng 2020). As such, *The #FEAS Report* also drew on arts-based tactics demonstrated by collectives and performers such as pvi collective (2022), whose work investigates and creatively intervenes through theatrical practices to 'create systemic change' (<https://pvicollective.com/about/>). *The #FEAS Report* also drew from a comedy lineage of satirical news programmes such as Susie Blake who would read faux news reports on the British 1980s comedy sketch show *Victoria Wood As Seen On TV; That Was The Week That Was* which aired in the USA in the 1960s as well as more recent comedic cultural outputs such as *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*, which adds to the intelligibility of the work. Choosing to perform our data in this way was also a nod to the notion of 'fake news' that characterizes Trump-era politics in the US and beyond, and to a lineage of satirical fake news outlets such as *The Onion*, *The National Enquirer*, and more recently *The Shovel* (Journell 2017). However, whilst our newsroom and reporters may have been fake, the content of *The #FEAS Report* is based upon real research that situates the creative elements of the work.

Situated bodies

The positioning of situated bodies makes visible the often hidden, stumbling, queer, and collective lived experiences of academics-at-work and otherwise (unseen) bodies of knowledge. Key to the making of the video was the creative tactic of presenting situated bodies in a non-hierarchical ensemble performance. This process involved an 'all-in' practice of working-together. Working-together in this way involved rapport and trust between the group and the all-in approach involved physically carrying set items between locations, adapting to improvised script and location variations, and performing simple ensemble choreography.

The unassuming corporeal confidence of the researchers-as-performers reveals unapologetic bodies of lived experience. These are bodies that know how everyday sexism *feel*, and who are situated and variously positioned as white, middle-class, working class, queer, lesbian, soft butch, femme, fat. They are bodies that address Lather's musing of 'what it means to know and to tell' (2013, 638) through the inconsistencies, ambiguities, and complexities of lived experience. Lather also reminds us of the importance of resisting

habitual ways of reading data. This is true in regards to how the video, including script, performance, and editing, helps viewers *resist habitual ways of reading data*. It is our hope that the video, as a creative intervention, does *something* with viewers, and does it differently than a traditional written research report or paper. *The #FEAS Report* has the potential to unhinge assumptions about everyday sexism, rather than fix these as universal truths for all women. ‘Situativeness’ here refers to the specific contexts, such as disciplines or universities, that impact on the experiences of participants in relation to everyday sexism. Intersectionality, or the idea that the same kinds of discrimination are experienced differently by different social groups, offers a framework for understanding these complexities (Crenshaw 1991), as not all people experience sexism in the same way, and those with multiple marginalized identities can experience racism, sexism, and homophobia through a single sexist interaction (Veldhuis 2022). Creative tactics therefore make room for audiences to engage with sexism differently as performance is a medium for transmitting affect, producing discomfort and offering multiple ways to read the same text (Jefferies 2020).

By holding everyday sexism up to the light, new connections between gender, COVID-19, and Higher Education workplaces are brought into being in ways that challenge what the contemporary academy counts as useful or valid. Australian universities are shaped by masculinist, neoliberal techniques that measure the worth of institutions themselves, and the individuals who work within them (Sims 2020). A key technique deployed within the contemporary university is to relentlessly measure and compare h-indexes, ‘a numerical indicator of how productive and influential a researcher is’ (Spicer 2015, no page). Therefore, contemporary universities understand usefulness in particular ways that individualize and set up competition between institutions as well as between individuals working within the same institution. The h-index measures how useful one’s work is; ‘when citation becomes an index, other things follow: the more he is cited, the more evidence of impact; the more value to an organization’ (Ahmed 2019, 193). The reporting of research tends to reflect this working model of achievement, value and worth and so more traditional forms of research present results or findings by describing what was found, how data was collected and the new information or contribution to an existing conversation that can be offered to a particular field of study. *The #FEAS Report* does present the findings of our study, but differently. For instance, where results and findings are often presented around the argument of the study, *The #FEAS Report* instead presents findings through sport, news, and traffic reports. Research reports or research articles will also have a discussion section, often considered the most important. Here, the authors of the study often structure the discussion around a central argument or set of key points. Instead of this, *The #FEAS Report* invites the viewing audience to draw their own conclusions by watching, listening and, hopefully, laughing with researchers who are made visible.

Anchoring in

Using the conventions of a live and local TV news report, three anchors sit side-by-side in a stark wood-panelled newsroom emulating the pressured situation of ‘breaking news’ to communicate the sport, weather and traffic of the day (Figure 2). The making of this news report via a one-day shoot echoed both the pressured deadlines



Figure 2. Anchoring in. Still image from *The #FEAS Report*.

of a newsroom, and the persistent urgency, stress and anxiety of the pandemic, as indicated in our survey research, where reports of ‘anxiety or dread’ related to job precarity and deep-seated concerns about research productivity were endemic (Gray et al. 2022). The news format allows for different kinds of configurations and understandings of everyday sexism to play out, and this then might open up for collective change. It moves beyond more traditional ways of researching because we, the researchers, are not the only ones taking part in analysis; the viewer is also invited to analyse the data through the format of a news report. This allows for unexpected readings of sexism (Lather 2013) that are slippery, ephemeral, and lingering to come to viewers’ attention.

Mindy: (Distracted with breaking news sounding in her fake earpiece) News Just In: #FEAS have released an exclusive report carried out by Jackie Ullman, Emily Gray, Mindy Blaise, and Jo Pollitt based on a survey sent out to Australian academics to find out more about the gendered effects of COVID-19. 180 people responded and 44 of those respondents volunteered to take part in an interview. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with 11 participants. Findings from the survey highlight the following:

- 60% of the respondents experienced feelings of anxiety, dread and uncertainty about the future
- 66% increased the time they spent on preparing teaching in the pivot to online learning
- 76% reported concerns about their research productivity
- 83% reported an increase in pointless meetings in the shift to online
- 50% reported declining trust in their university management

But don’t worry, it’s not all bad news because ... 4% of the respondents did not experience an increase in workload!

Mindy’s deadpan delivery of this information, direct from the news desk allowed for simultaneous rage and irony and acted as ‘a means to open up the path to establish solidarity’ (Quah and Eh 2020). In the era of COVID-19, this sense of solidarity is more vital and

urgent than ever. *The #FEAS Report* deploys irony and faux-earnestness as a way of making serious points about COVID-19, gender and Higher Education in Australia.

By sitting performers at a makeshift news desk to read the report as if for the first time, Mindy was able to express a seemingly objective concern for the apparent 'breaking' information at hand, while also clearly the subject (as in the weather). The earnest delivery of the performer was disrupted by the frivolous device of the fake ear piece, giving mixed signals to the audience through the double embodiment of presenting both as subject and as 'outside eye'.

Sport: Reporting live, from the field

Organising *The #FEAS Report* into familiar segments of sport, weather, and traffic allowed us to play on metaphors to illustrate research findings in ways that are more expansive than in regular ways of researching and writing. For this segment, Gray played the sports reporter. Her queer masc gender presentation and costume that references a stereotypical 'lesbian' Physical Education teacher is a literal and metaphorical call to play. The script for this section was written after watching regional news sports reports and listening to the kinds of 'personal interest' stories they tell and the linguistic techniques deployed. As a result, this segment is deliberately up tempo in its delivery and draws upon sporting metaphors as a way of presenting and re-interpreting data. For example:

Emily: There was good news for the straight, white men's 2020 event, where they managed to ride in on the wave of working from home which was a great win for them. Margie from Melbourne, speaking from the sidelines with 2 children under 5 says:

Quite a few men have openly said in front of me what a great year it's been for them because they've been at home and they haven't been interrupted, they've been so productive and haven't had to travel here and there *and* they got 2 books out this year!

Presenting the data through the use of sporting metaphors also brings attention to the masculinized, neoliberal model of Higher Education that pits staff against one another in competition for funding, measuring h-indexes, comparing field weighted citations, and other such professional (in)competencies. Using sport and games as a metaphor for academic success allows for new ways to reference research that illustrates how women-identifying professors often talk about their career success in terms of luck and chance (see for example, Diezmann and Griesbhaber 2019).

Presenting data as sporting events that ultimately cannot be won by women-identifying academics also allows us to visually represent Ahmed's (2019) articulation of what it means affectively to occupy spaces that were not made for us and, therefore, within which it is difficult to thrive. The inclusion of a balance beam, as illustrated in the image (Figure 3) above, references the 'balancing act' that women-identified academic workers, especially those with children and/or other caring responsibilities, articulated in the qualitative component of our survey. These findings were aligned with the practical challenges of managing working at home, as evidenced in the quantitative survey, where over 40% of the sample ($n = 74$; 41.8%) indicated that they did not have a private/quiet working space (Gray et al. 2022). In our survey, academic women with children reported taking on the lion's share of domestic and emotional labour during the pandemic, including homeschooling during periods of lockdown. The attempt to find 'balance' under such conditions appeared to be futile, as many reported feelings of guilt, dread, and anxiety



Figure 3. The Sport Report. Still from *The #FEAS Report*.

about their academic responsibilities. Further imagery in the report included an empty Olympic stadium, likewise sat as juxtaposition to the reporter's ironic reading of statistics related to the affective dimensions of the pandemic where 'mental health issues also raced out of the blocks'. Unsurprisingly, for our survey participants, where their academic institutions communicated financial insecurity to their staff, asking them to volunteer or 'gift' their time/labour, they were significantly more likely to report negative mental health.

Weather update brought to you by the BOEM¹: the bureau of *enough* misogyny

The weather report plays with the notion of the commercial TV 'weather girl', replacing her with Mindy, a grey haired middle-aged lesbian, who does the job of presenting and communicating the facts in a slightly dismissive way, as she flicks her cue cards onto the floor with disdain for the inequalities she is reporting on. The use of the queer middle-aged body taking on the role of the cliched 'weather girl' in a matter-of-fact and embodied presentation of 'rising temperatures' in academia presents the viewer with a disrupted visual that invites accessible understandings of difficult and depressing findings (Figure 4).

Mindy: And just like the separation of worklife and homelife, a low pressure front will sweep across the nation to reveal a storm that's about to break, Di from Darwin says:

Just look at who makes up the exec staff at universities and the professoriate – it's stale pale male. The pandemic is only amplifying the gender imbalance (woman/female, LGBTQIA, ongoing, no uni affiliation)



Figure 4. The Weather Report. Still image from *The #FEAS Report*.

The weather update presented findings from the survey that related to the affective dimensions of Australian universities' pandemic responses. Metaphors of forecasting and predicting were drawn upon, as recognizable elements of the standard weather report. Again, the DIY aesthetic is found in the props, hand-written cue cards and hand-made sticky-tacked weather symbols. These are gesturing towards a past remembered by the performers, before the newsroom was full of high-tech weather maps, developed by computer models able to present weather and simulate how the weather develops over the coming days. Using the analogy of weather enabled the direct communication of ominous findings as a 'storm brewing', with academics

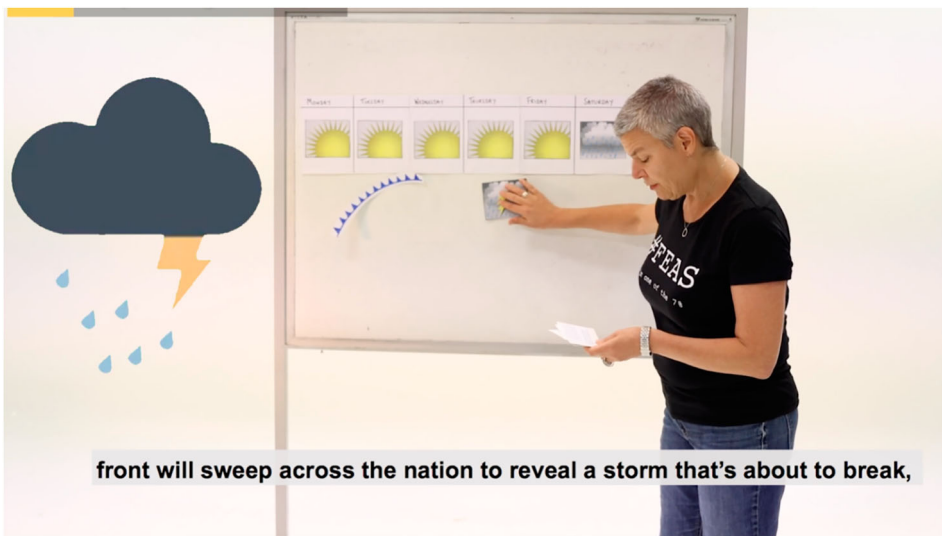


Figure 5. The Weather Report. Still image from *The #FEAS Report*.

revealing in the data their ‘feelings’ that they have had enough of inequities and sexism in the academy (Figure 5).

Traffic report: gridlock for many

Jo: ... crossing live we can report that traffic has come to a standstill in various parts of the country on issues of women in research.

Traffic reports in popular local and national news programming are often performed by cisgender men in helicopters or light aeroplanes, literally representing man and machine as intertwined, and man as ascending and viewing the world from a distance and with an objective eye (Figure 6). To subvert this masculinist technique, Jo presented the traffic report from a grass verge in the middle of a busy four-lane road. A fake fluffy boom with cords visibly unplugged was used to indicate and reference the ‘live-to-air’ feel of traffic reports that are often accompanied by the whir of helicopter blades.

In presenting data via an up-to-the-minute traffic report, we were able to use humour that would not work in a more traditional paper, for example, the sweeping statement of ‘COVID has brought with it massive slowdowns on the career highway’ only works because this finding is situated within the frame of a satirical news report. By using the matter-of-fact form of a live-cross news traffic report, we are able to both subvert and overtly outline the survey data with an ironic sense of rigour, validity, and reliability associated with determining the trustworthiness of traditional research.

Jo: So bunker down and be prepared for long and ongoing career delays ...

Presenting our research findings as sport, weather, and traffic report formats allowed us to,



Figure 6. The Traffic Report. Still image from *The #FEAS Report*.

Take seriously the means and modes through which we make and communicate research and examine what emerges when the what and the how (as well as the where and the why) are understood as intimately tied (Jungnickel 2020, 2).

The #FEAS Report explores ‘how and in what ways research transmissions create openings and connections with and in social worlds’ (Jungnickel 2020) to challenge modes of data (re)presentation, to subvert research reporting and to make it intelligible to audiences outside of the academy, as well as inviting academic audiences to think differently about what ‘counts’ as output and research reporting.

Conclusion: reorienting the anchor

By sharing research findings through creative tactics, *The #FEAS Report* goes some way to making ‘public’ the disturbing inequalities made more prominent than ever during the (ongoing) COVID-19 pandemic. Directorial decisions were propelled by working with metaphors of sport, weather, and traffic to dramatize the survey data. This work contributes to feminist research within both education and creative practice and disrupts hetero-patriarchal norms of delivering research ‘headlines’. It is insistent that everyday sexism exists, structurally and through the everyday. Each of the creative tactics, *DIY aesthetic*, *humour*, *situated bodies*, work together to generate a different kind of reporting that is affirmative rather than critiquing, thriving rather than surviving. Naming and calling out everyday sexism is difficult and problematic because of structures within the university, such as reporting mechanisms that can close down, rather than open-up opportunities to talk about and challenge gender-based discrimination (Ahmed 2015). The work of #FEAS includes, but also moves outside of traditional scholarship to challenge the gendered status quo in academia. *The #FEAS Report* is an attempt to simultaneously disarm and expand thinking with everyday sexism, and to create a space for people who have experienced sexism at work to feel as though they are not alone, and that they belong. We see developing and showing this work an active political move that disrupts hierarchies of academy-based knowledge and enables #FEAS to be in conversation with a critical and creative public audience.

Note

1. The Australian Bureau of Meteorology, otherwise known as the BoM, is Australia’s national weather, climate and water agency

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