

Doing power, deferring difference:
Gendered-raced processes and the case of Karen Barad

Dr. Kate Lockwood Harris
University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, USA
kharris@umn.edu
corresponding author

Dr. Karen Lee Ashcraft
University of Colorado—Boulder, USA
karen.ashcraft@colorado.edu

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Studying something is not just about coming to know it. To study a thing is also to *do* that thing—to summon ‘it’ into being. This core idea animates relational theories which consider any ‘thing,’ or more precisely any phenomenon, to emerge through perpetually shifting connections to other ‘things’ that are similarly in process. From this perspective, scholarly practice is a contingent production of that which it seeks to know (Ashcraft, 2017, 2018; Harris, 2016a, 2019). For instance, studies of organization and management are enactments of the organizational and managerial relations that enable them to proceed. In this way, research is not only an epistemological endeavor, but also an ontological practice.

In this paper, we zoom in on our field’s recent efforts to advance relational thinking through process-oriented studies of power. We turn the aforementioned premise of relational thinking back on this line of inquiry to ask how power is brought into being as we scholars study it. We take the move to *rethink* power processually as a *redoing* of power in our midst, and we are curious about *how power is happening ‘in the process’*, so to speak. This paper thus explores the politics of organization and management studies, considering what relations of power are materializing in this community’s practices.

While many have exposed political relations among organization and management scholars, it remains rare to consider theorizations of power as enactments of power. Doing so enables us to argue that, as our community traces the intellectual lineage of relationality (i.e., that mode of thinking that enables a process orientation), our scholarly practices yield ‘general’ versus ‘specific’ versions of power. In this configuration, matters of difference such as gender, sexuality, and race are ‘specific’ and, thereby, continually deferred as peripheral to critical theorizations of power. Differences become minor tributaries and peculiar instances of a more pervasive and sweeping force, rather than major, central vectors of capitalist operation.

In many ways, this ‘general’ versus ‘specific’ effect and its resulting deferral of difference are not new. Organization and management scholars have long observed that the field treats feminist, postcolonial, critical race, and queer inquiry as special cases or narrow offshoots of ‘mainstream’ critique (e.g., Broadfoot & Munshi, 2007; Grimes & Parker, 2009). In an analysis of scholarship on gender in *Organization*, for example, N. Harding, Ford, and Fotaki

(2013) argued that “the influence of major feminist theorists and much sophisticated feminist thought is limited” (p. 52). Likewise, Ashcraft (2016) documented the marginality of feminisms in management studies and identified discursive strategies that actively reproduce this condition. As Liu (2018) showed, this shelving occurs even while the field insists it has already resolved its gender trouble. The circumscribed uptake of feminist theories parallels the field’s engagement with other axes of difference. Cooke (2003) showed that slavery fundamentally shapes contemporary management practice but is rarely discussed in histories of the field. More recently, linking organization studies to geopolitical power dynamics, Nkomo (2011) detailed “the exclusion and marginalization of Africa in leadership and management discourse” (p. 366). And Jørgensen, Strand, and Boje (2013) asserted that management scholarship “has been suppressive of plural voices (in particular, native voices)” (p. 44). In discussions of sexuality, numerous scholars have noted the field’s pervasive heteronormativity and called for less straight methods and objects of study (e.g., Reumens, de Souza, & Brewis, 2018; McDonald, 2017). They note that organization studies has “late and limited engagement with queer theory, politics, and identities” (Pullen, Thanem, Tyler, & Wallenberg, 2016, p. 1). Summarizing the field’s failure to make difference central to power, Zaroni, Janssens, Benschop, and Nkomo (2010) concluded “much remains to be done” (p. 17).

Our claim, therefore, is not that the deferral of difference—that is, the sidelining of gender, sexuality, race, and other vectors of differentiation as specific and tangential case(s) of power—is new. Rather, we claim that difference is being set aside yet again in the act of reinventing power through relationality. In this sense, the current move to rethink power processually is less novel than it may appear, for it is repeating familiar relations. We aim to show not just *that* but *how* we are deferring difference again, as well as how we might do otherwise.

To illustrate, we home in on one influential strand of relational thinking: feminist new materialism (FNM), a theory that upends Cartesian dualism and anthropocentrism to address oppression. We show how its peculiar presences and absences in organization and management studies stave off more transformative engagements with difference and, instead, replicate existing systems of inequity. Specifically, we focus on the uptake of one FNM scholar’s work, that of Karen Barad, as integral to process approaches. Barad’s discussions of agential realism (1998), diffraction (2014), posthumanist performativity (2003), and material-discursive intra-

action (2007) have had significant impact in the field. A quick assessment shows these ideas operating centrally in many edited volumes, monographs, and journals such as *Academy of Management Journal*, *Organization*, and *Human Relations*. They have become central in our fields. And yet, as organizational scholars grapple with Barad's oeuvre, they tend to gloss the work's queer, feminist, and political impetus.

Taking the field's invocation of Barad as our point of departure, we first (a) identify the citational and organizational processes whereby FNM is adopted without acknowledgment of its radical commentary on gender and sexuality. We then (b) provide background on the details of FNM that get lost in the deferral of difference. In so doing, we also highlight critiques of the theory's whiteness and colonialism that have not yet made their way to this community's academic outlets. Finally, we (c) envision practices that can actualize the possibilities of FNM. Our goal is to evoke scholarly performances that would more fully materialize difference in studies of organization, including those of organizational power.

How Does Power Happen 'in the Process'? Deferring Difference Again by Cutting FNM

In emerging relational approaches to power, repeated processes defer difference. In this section, we name and describe three of these processes so that they are more recognizable. First, Barad's relational approach is invoked without relationships. This process produces the scholar-genius, an individual whose intellectual prowess comes only from within, not from interaction (or as Barad would say, intra-action). As a consequence, queer scholars of color and postcolonial thinkers along with their theories are relegated outside the bounds of FNM. Second, scholars invoke Barad's disciplinary background, along with the racialized and gendered aspects of disciplines, to mark their own and others' work as more or less meritorious and rigorous. This long-standing pattern reinforces "science" as objective and rigorous, "arts" as subjective and flighty, but FNM actually upends this divide. Last, Barad becomes a placeholder for general social constructivist principles, a process that overlooks that FNM scholars roundly critique social construction because it maintains inequity on the basis of difference. Together, these processes, what Barad would call "cuts"¹—divorce FNM from queer and feminist theory. They reinforce existing, troublesome hierarchies in academic organizing by deferring difference.

Citing Only Single Ladies: Authorizing Relational Theory Without Relationships

¹ See Barad (2007). Cuts are processes that produce an entity by separating it from its ongoing, constantly reconfigured flow of connections and relations.

When invoking principles from feminist new materialism (FNM), scholars often omit the key intellectual relationships from which the theory emerged. They rarely note that the theory they are citing is feminist, and the ideas appear ahistorical. When describing agential realism or intra-action, scholars will cite Barad, and Barad alone, as if the work has no genealogy (e.g., Nyberg, 2009). In this fantasy, scholarship proceeds when isolated geniuses arrive on the scene. Barad becomes Zeus, and FNM becomes Athena who springs from his head fully formed. The Zeusification of Barad is part of a larger pattern whereby academics erase intellectual movements (interdependent *thinking*) in favor of innately smart, individual heroes (independent *thinkers*). This isolating process is a masculinist habit of writing practiced by most scholars, us two authors included.

In some ways, we find Barad's seeming independence—this 'singleness'—thrilling. It is so rare for the academy to authorize anyone but a cis het man to act alone that we cheer when someone different is cast as Zeus. In organization and management studies, Barad seems to have become one of the guys, and we relish that morphing and bending of gender as well as the power it signals. We also note that, as Barad and FNM have been admitted to the halls of power, the nuanced history of feminist and queer theory that Barad relied upon has been lost. This trend is easy to notice. For example, when Orlikowski and Scott (2015) used Barad's concept, agential realism, for their excellent study of the hospitality industry, the words "gender," "feminism," and any of their variations never appeared in the article. Similarly, Ford, Harding, Gilmore, and Richardson (2017) engaged Barad with nuance in their study of leadership, but FNM's links to politics and ethics dropped away. A surface-level symptom of this anti-relationality is readily apparent: The word "feminism" appears in multiple titles in the reference list, but it gets mentioned nowhere in the text of the article. When FNM appears disconnected from its queer, feminist lineage, and when just one feminist is mentioned in the scholarly processes that signal emerging relational ontologies, Barad stands in for the total of feminist thinking about new materialism. The field accepts Barad as a token, the single 'lady'² who announces the field's engagement with feminisms absent a commitment to difference.

When a relational story does get told about FNM and Barad, it brings them both into proximity with theories that do not contend with difference. Relationality thus enters the field

² Barad pushes against this role in their recent adoption of gender-neutral, non-binary pronouns, they and their.

through sameness. FNM's specific feminist and queer conceptual and analytical content dissipates, difference evaporates, and already established intellectual and theoretical patterns remain. Barad gets sandwiched between parentheses along with actor network theorists (ANT) and object-oriented ontologists (OOO). Thus grouped by similarity, Barad's iteration of FNM appears indistinguishable from these other theories that, although resonant, do not grapple with gender, race, and sexuality. Absent these differences, Barad gets used to reinforce, not challenge, the field's powerful foundations. This process and some of its consequences are evident in Iedema's (2007) argument that discourse and materiality are not so distinct. The article relied heavily on Barad, who was cast in relationship to Latour and other men, not queer theorists such as Sedgwick or Berlant. Scanning the reference list, this problem becomes glaring. Of the pieces Iedema cites, only 12.5% of first authors are women or gender non-binary. The piece substantially engages with the vocabulary of FNM, which has been developed primarily if not exclusively by feminists and queer theorists, few of whom are men. The intellectual history Iedema solidifies, however, consists of almost 90% dudes. If Barad and FNM are not different, then organization and management studies need not be different. This form of anti-relationality replicates a homosocial, not a queer, process of power. Moreover, by citing only a single 'lady,' the field misses that *all the single ladies* are in relationship to each other.

Academic Mansplaining: Maintaining Hierarchical Disciplinary Values

A second power play, a process that contains and cuts FNM, emerges in characterizations of Barad's disciplinary origins and inclinations. Even as her embeddedness in feminist and queer studies is rarely invoked, her status as a physicist is often mentioned. Of course, there are many ways to read this habit, and we offer two generous options here. One is that science and technology studies (STS) is a major pathway by which relationality found its way into organization and management studies. Consequently, as a recognized 'science'—or should we say, *hard* science—physics may seem a naturally affiliate field. A second reading is that, in the relative hierarchy of disciplines, organization and management studies still strains for scientific standing. Sharing conceptual ground with physicists may seem to boost the gravity (pun intended) of our theorizing. In either case, however, it becomes difficult to deny how the gendering and racialization of disciplines animates scholarly impulses regarding 'natural' disciplinary allies or those that enhance the comparative stature of a field. This point was driven home with some irony when one of our local colleagues in physics observed that work like

Barad's suffers lower status within his field due to its 'soft' and 'loose' quality, 'merely' theoretical.

The result is an academic version of mansplaining and whitesplaining: Ideas from those in the arts and humanities, when packaged as the outcome of scientific experiment and method, suddenly sound smarter and get taken up as generally applicable. This reinforcement of a "hierarchical system of value and desire" produces violence against black female bodies (Jackson, 2018, p. 619). Lost are the feminist and queer theorists for whom the general is gen(d)eral, i.e., gender (and race and sexuality) so pattern all processes that to speak of the general without gender is to miss a core facet of power. These moves surface frequently in discussions of method. For instance, Barad's (2007; 2014) explication of *diffraction* relied on detailed diagrams of the apparatuses physicists used to study light along with already developed conceptualizations of diffraction from philosophers and film critics. Organization and management studies appeals to the former when it notes that Barad adopts Niels Bohr's ideas. Haraway and Minh-Ha are rarely credited. As Irni (2013) pointed out, similar value games about disciplinarity occur within and among FNM scholars, too: In FNM's own uptake of Barad, merely doing 'natural' science signals that a scholar is accounting for materiality, and this conflation between materiality and science displaces race to other methods.

In some early publications when "diffraction" entered the field, scholars relied on secondary sources that cited feminist theory, but they dropped the feminist contents in their own discussion. An example occurred in Cox and Hassard's (2005) article that rethought triangulation in management research methods. Discussing one of their proposed techniques, Cox and Hassard identified its similarity to 'diffraction' as a limitation. They went on to suggest that their approach might be an effort to "play the god trick," a phrase they quote from Robin Usher et al. and also trace to Roy Jacques. Scholars familiar with feminist research methods will know immediately that "the god trick" was originally discussed by feminist philosopher Donna Haraway. That link is hard to surface in Cox and Hassard's writing. They quote male scholar Robin Usher; Usher was citing feminist educational theorist, Patti Lather; Lather, in turn, was reading and drawing upon Donna Haraway who developed diffraction as a way to *avoid* science's ubiquitous "god trick," not replicate it. A diligent reader unfamiliar with feminisms would need to work back three layers of citation in order to notice this omission. Instead, pieces of Haraway's ideas are taken out of context and attributed to two male management scholars.

The contours of these disciplinary debates place Leonardi's (2013) criticism of Barad and FNM in context. He asserted, following a line of thinking that Scott and Orlikowski (2013) roundly rejected, that Barad's approach cannot explain empirical phenomena. Setting aside that Leonardi does not contend with Barad's extensive writing on FNM's method, diffraction, what is important here is that Leonardi's definition of 'empirical' is established through a science/materiality conflation. By contrast, FNM cannot be performed through the usual modes whereby scholars test, explain, and represent what is 'out there' in the world. In blurring the practices that discipline the natural apart from the social, FNM radically reconfigures what it means to be empirical and to do empiricism. Although Barad thoroughly problematizes artificial disciplinary lines that separate 'hard' from 'soft' modes of inquiry, organization and management scholars tend to mine the former more than the latter. This move reinforces the supposed objectivity, masculinity, and whiteness of science, the subjectivity, femininity and color of the arts.

Obscuring Key Complexities: Reducing FNM to a Proxy for Social Construction

Third, Barad gets cited to establish general tenets of social construction or to help authors make an argument that knowledge is never purely objective. By citing Barad for these principles, authors usefully put feminist thought at the center of organizational scholarship. They simultaneously miss not only that these ideas are well-established in decades-old feminist traditions, but, more importantly, they gloss FNM's key tenets: Barad and other FNM scholars *critique* social construction, and the claim that knowledge is not objective was established among feminist methodologists in the 1970s. FNM scholars extend and nuance these feminist conversations about the relationship between materiality and discourse by refusing to separate ontology from epistemology (and ethics). FNM poses fundamental challenges to the theories and methods that animate our field, including social construction. As a consequence of this rendering of FNM in our field, organizational scholars are arriving late to the party and underdressed.

This lack of etiquette and fashion sense occurs often, and Gherardi's (2016) nuanced intellectual history of the linguistic turn provides a useful example. Gherardi said, "In the wider acceptance of the linguistic turn, the taken-for-granted distinction between ontology and epistemology collapses once we recognize the role of language in constructing the object of being" (p. 684). Gherardi notes that the collection of scholars who make this "collapse" share an interest in power, and she traces this thinking through Foucault, Rouse, Pickering, and

Haraway. This is a relational account of FNM's cousins, and so Gherardi avoids the first process we outlined above. The trouble, though, is that Gherardi uses Barad's term, *onto-epistemology*, to describe these ideas. When the linguistic turn and FNM are thus drawn into proximity, readers could easily miss their key distinction: In FNM, language does not construct objects of being; instead, language and objects of being co-construct each other. FNM scholars, including Barad, assert that the linguistic turn *retained* a split between ontology and epistemology, but Gherardi uses Barad's vocabulary to suggest that the linguistic turn eradicated that divide. With this move, the characteristic arguments of FNM, one component of a *material* turn, become difficult to notice. Gherardi might more accurately suggest that the linguistic turn challenged an absolute separation between ontology and epistemology, but FNM works to further collapse that distinction by decentering the role of (human) language. FNM shows that social constructivist approaches *preserved* the ontology-epistemology divide, and that critique of the linguistic turn is the grounds upon which FNM centers difference.

These processes or cuts that defer difference replicate a familiar form of power. They are accomplished as tokenized queer feminists get cast as isolated individuals (a move that, as we explain later, upholds whiteness), disciplinary boundaries that rely gendered and racialized hierarchies are reinforced, and the distinguishing features of the theory are reduced to social construction. In the next section, we offer an account of FNM that challenges these tendencies and, in so doing, illustrate a bit of what is lost when these processes happen repeatedly.

Why Are These Deferrals of Difference Important? The Material Cut Away

When these cuts defer difference, what do management and organizational scholars miss? What do these processes leave out of the field, and what are the impacts? To answer these questions, we offer a relational account of Barad's work that traces some connections from which Barad's ideas emerge. To do so, we organize the following sections around one concept that scholars often attribute to Barad. For each, we trace a story about *why* and *how* the concept emerged from the complexities of feminist political, intellectual, and activist histories along with related power-attentive traditions (e.g., queer and decolonial theory). We trace multiple relations so that Barad does not stand alone (or alongside a collection of similarly isolated, white, cis het

dudes) in a story about genius-heroes. In this account, Barad is not Zeus, the humanities and sciences intermingle, and FNM is not another constructivist theory.

In keeping with our earlier assertion that to study power is to make power, we note that some of the relations from which FNM has emerged drop away in our rendering of it. The essay thus replicates some of the power formations it is interested in upending, and hints of the processes we named above remain. We perform, as we write, the key method and mode of critique that FNM offers to process-based studies of power: Noticing the implications of repeatedly invoked or ignored relations while simultaneously participating in those processes. We are aware of some reductions we have made in this account, and we are certainly unaware of others. Elsewhere, Harris and Fortney (2017) argued that relationality disrupts a separation between authors who write texts and readers who interpret them. Accordingly, as part of an ongoing process of re-relationalizing Barad, we invite readers to notice our authorly simplifications. We see these engagements with and critiques of our paper as one component of the difference-affirming processes we write toward.

Onto-epistemology: Intertwined Being and Knowing

Several decades ago, a flurry of scholarly energy animated what is now dubbed the linguistic turn. While many academics worked to account for the ways in which symbolic systems, meaning making, and human interaction shaped the world, a number of feminists were not so sanguine about the turn. Social construction, which underwrote many aspects of the linguistic turn, provided many possibilities for eradicating gender inequity and related forms of oppression. For instance, it challenged the notion that gender roles and qualities are stable, enduring, and natural. But it also presented political problems. If gender was primarily a product of social interaction, the stuff that emerged through words and talking and discourse, then people hostile to feminism's aims could appropriate caricatured versions of a constructionist approach to argue that gender itself was not real but made up, invented through language games, not something solid, and certainly not something that merited serious attention. Declarations that the harms of misogyny, racism, and related forms of domination are gone or fictions that emerge from hysteria, hypersensitivity, or unreasonableness are made often to reestablish existing power structures. When these claims circulate in popular and academic spaces, gender is relegated to

the realm of imagination and cast as a frivolous concern. Its attendant problems (e.g., wage gaps) can be ignored.³

Because of these challenges, the linguistic turn and some iterations of social construction have never been easy friends with feminisms. For decades, feminists have relied upon some social constructionist principles to intervene in the notion that sex (along with race, other aspects of difference, and the domination associated with them) are innate, unmoving, unlively, and therefore enduring and permanent. Simultaneously, feminists have established the facts about white supremacist patriarchy's damages. They have done so by resisting aspects of social construction such that gender cannot be considered so learned, malleable, fluid, and subject to culture that its impacts can be discounted. Reflecting on this line of thinking, decades ago Fuss (1989) asserted:

There is no compelling reason to assume that the natural is, in essence, essentialist and that the social is, in essence, constructionist. If we are to intervene effectively in the impasse created by the essentialist/constructionist divide, it might be necessary to begin questioning the *constructionist* assumption that nature and fixity go together (naturally) just as sociality and change go together (naturally). (p. 6)

Instead of ossifying 'nature' while maintaining the endless flexibility of 'culture,' as some anti-oppression efforts have done with varying degrees of success, feminisms—and the FNM that emerges from them—secure nature and culture as both solid and fluid. They have complicated the 'social' so that it is no longer the exclusive purview of humans and their symbolic systems. As a consequence, language neither describes reality nor creates it. Instead, it is material *of* the world, a part of the process by which the world continues to come into being.

To unstudied eyes, these ideas seem to pattern historical feminisms with inconsistencies. Feminists have used symbols to explain reality and also to invent and invoke realities that are yet-to-be. In other words, feminists have used communication to transmit information and also to constitute what they have imagined, often adopting both stances within one argument or instance of activism. Although academics seeking epistemic purity might dismiss this theorizing, numerous scholars have shown that these so-called contradictions are a central, political signature of feminisms (e.g., Gavey, 2011; J. W. Scott, 1997). So, too, are they central in queer

³ For a detailed account of the history and argument outlined in this passage, see Harris (2016b).

theory, where Muñoz et al. (2015) argued that enacting its principles means performing the “necessary queer labor of the incommensurate” (p. 209). These “incommensurate” approaches develop a system of knowing and being in which symbols and language do not stand apart from things and matter (e.g., Harris, 2016b). Discursivity and physicality are intertwined, and so too are ways of knowing and being.

Given these histories, feminist new materialism upends a core principle that has guided much organizational research. It does not proceed from Cartesian dualism, in which mind (the processor of symbols that provides an entry into culture and society) makes human lives more noteworthy and important than other forms of existence. Instead, FNM understands mind/body and culture/nature to be intertwined and constitutive of each other (e.g., Wilson, 2015). Under the prevailing dualisms, knowledge claims are separable from what exists and what is real. Scholars can know *about* something and make claims that describe or explain a phenomenon. ‘Things’ are independent from humans’ knowledge of them. By contrast, under FNM, knowledge claims cannot be distinguished from being: Reality is bound up in how it is known and how it makes itself known. In other words, epistemology and ontology are joined. Barad (2007) uses the term “onto-epistemology” to mark this aspect of the theory.

Despite the handy label, this idea is not Barad’s alone. In an essay originally published in the 1980s, Haraway (1991) introduced the cyborg, a cross between animal and machine that appears in feminist science fiction and reality. By focusing on the cyborg as archetype and analytic, “nature and culture are reworked” (p. 152) and “the boundary between physical and non-physical is very imprecise” (p. 154). Haraway (2003) later codified these ideas with the term *natureculture*. Although Haraway, like Barad, is often cast as an independent hero, Haraway’s work also emerges from many relations, including Sandoval’s (2000) oppositional consciousness and Anzaldúa’s (1987) borderlands and mestiza consciousness. When these relations are not noted, the contributions of postcolonial and ‘third world’ queer feminisms, such as those from Chicana studies and scholars, are disappeared, and the whiteness of the individual scholar-genius is secured.

Before returning to the latter claim’s racial and colonial implications, we pause on the word “queer.” Barad frequently underscores the embeddedness and indebtedness of their thinking in and to queer theory. But the indispensability of queerness to the development of FNM is nowhere as sharply articulated as in Barad’s (2012b) work on “nature’s queer

performativity.” There, in a searing refutation of the nature-culture divide and the human exceptionalism and moralism it desires, Barad proposes that queer theory is not so much a breach of that divide (i.e., a cultural critique of assertions about nature) as it is an expression, a materialization, of the empirical and ethical indivisibility of nature-culture. If culture is not outside of nature but, rather, something nature does (and vice-versa), then we can begin to understand the *epistemological* uncertainty advanced by queer theory as enacting the more fundamental *ontological* indeterminacy of world-making. Indeed, Barad “makes the wager that the radical reverberations of deconstructionism are not merely pervasive imaginings of the human mind or of culture but are, in fact, *queer happenings of the world*” (p. 44, original emphasis). Simply put, the world is thoroughly queer in its constant becoming, which Barad demonstrates not only through a reminder of queer zoological histories, but also through ‘natural’ phenomenon as diverse as social amoebas, lightning, and the atom. In short, queerness is integral to world-making of all forms (to *spacetime mattering*, as Barad calls it). And this vital queering of the world’s relational emergence, Barad says, demands a model of justice and accountability that rejects those practices which squelch the ecologies of diversity crucial to nature’s flourishing.

In focusing on the queerness of these claims, we have emphasized that *Barad* points to FNM’s close connections to queer theory. In so doing, we center Barad in a section of our paper that works to provide a relational account of Barad. If we performed that work religiously, we would decenter this one scholar. In this instance, we are relying on Barad’s own explanations intentionally, and for effect. Barad clearly, directly, and emphatically discusses FNM’s queer origins. Readers need not have expertise in queer theory to notice these relations because they are explicitly named (whereas some of the links to gender and feminism are not). Because of this, we read the straightening of FNM in organization and management studies—i.e., the near total lack of mention or application of these strands of queer theory—as conspicuous reinforcement of homophobia in our midst.

Whereas queerness overtly patterns Barad’s iteration of FNM (but organizational scholars straighten it), decolonial and anti-racist theory may not be so obvious in Barad’s work.⁴ If organizational and management scholars take up only Barad, they are likely to miss these

⁴ For a discussion of where these links are explicit in Barad’s work, see Irni (2013).

relations out of which some iterations of FNM emerge. They will thereby reinforce white supremacy. Although Cartesian dualism patterns many of the theories used most widely in Euro-American organizational theory, it is far from universal. On the contrary, many traditions have never conceptualized things and beings as separate, though these traditions are seldom present in the most powerful corners of academe. Watts (2013) described epistemic assumptions of the Haudenosaunee and Anishnaabe in which society is not exclusively human. Instead, it includes interactions among “the female, animals, the spirit world, and the mineral and plant world” (p. 21). Watts explicated

a theoretical understanding of the world via a physical embodiment – *Place-Thought*. Place-Thought is the non-distinctive space where place and thought were never separated because they never could or can be separated. Place-Thought is based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking. (p. 21)

In this account, mind—and its associated command of thought and symbols—has never been distinct from the environment and nature. Those who critique FNM often note (a) the similarity between or even appropriation of indigenous concepts and aspects of FNM (e.g., López, 2018) and (b) new materialist scholars’ erroneous suggestion that Cartesian dualism is omnipresent (e.g., Todd, 2016).

Barad’s onto-epistemology (along with closely related concepts *agential realism* and *intra-action*) emerges from relationships and history. Without a sense for these connections, much is lost. Feminists’ decades-long, nuanced challenges to social construction are set aside, and process-based approaches appear to be yet another way for scholars to remake organization without also noticing that organization and its politics makes us and our power. Further, uptakes of onto-epistemology that neglect the centrality of queerness to Barad’s account of differentiation and identity miss what are for Barad among the most pivotal and generative considerations, ones that can make queerness a hallmark of (dis)organization. Moreover, when Barad is cast as a lone ‘lady,’ organizational and management scholars replicate a story about FNM and other process-based approaches that locates their origins in colonialist thinking. They neglect relations that may have already dropped away in Barad’s work. Challenges to a subject/object split seem ‘new’ under conditions of historical and cultural amnesia whereby intellectual work is deemed as such in peculiar circuits of publication with limited geographies. Absent the relations we have detailed here, along with others we have not, anti-relational

accounts of onto-epistemology along with the scholarship that adopts this idea will continue to miss why—practically, ethically, politically—this FNM analytic is important.

Anthropocentrism and Agency: Reworking the Human

If things and matter usually assumed to be inert, unthinking, and dead are instead “vibrant” (Bennett, 2010), then the peculiar characteristics often attributed to humans are accessible to varied beings and matter. Undoing (or never accepting in the first place) a separation between subjects and objects has been important for feminisms, queer theory, and critical race theories—among other traditions concerned with power—because that separation has often been the basis for domination. The bifurcation between knowing/mind and being/body establishes human exceptionalism while also locating some people outside the category human. It is the grounds upon which (human) subjects have claimed dominion over ‘animals’ and that which is presumed to be inanimate, including the environment (e.g., Twine, 2010). Under prevailing approaches to the world, ‘things’ become exploitable resources, and some people are objectified. Claims about who or what counts as human—subjects with language-wielding minds who build knowledge and exercise free will—have long sustained oppression on the basis of race and gender (Jackson, 2015). As Towns (2019) put it:

Why do Black lives equal matter? This is not an argument that Black people are matter, but that blackness, as a construct, shares a consistency with the Western construct of matter. The overlap between matter and blackness exists because, like Western conceptions of matter, Black bodies—as chattel, or the Negro (those ontological, epistemological, and biological constructs fabricated for us by the West)—have been situated as things, absent of self-determination. (pp. 2–3)

Towns, along with other scholars (Carrington, 2017; Seshadri, 2012), averred that “human” is established through racial violence: Whiteness and its systemic oppressions have been and in many ways continue to be prerequisites for inclusion in the category.

Given that FNM undermines human exceptionalism while drawing attention to the borders around “human” that exclude many groups of people from the label, FNM also challenges the oft-used concept “agency.” Routinely rendered as a measure of a human’s ability to consider multiple possible actions, use reason to select the best option, and then make intentional change in the world, agency under FNM is radically different. An FNM approach to agency rejects individualism and voluntarism. Detailing one of these FNM approaches, Bennett

(2005) said, “if one looks closely enough, the productive power behind effects is always a collectivity” (p. 463). Thus emphasizing connections, agency becomes the constant reconfiguring of relationships, an ongoing motion. Moreover, Barad (2007) suggested that agency always involves ethical considerations and is, in actuality, “response-ability,” or the capacity of complex systems to respond to phenomena in ways that are accountable to inequity. Detailing the importance of power-sensitive approaches to posthumanism, López (2018) argued that more-than-human people, such as corporations under US law, already exercise considerable (colonialist) agency, but it is rarely recognized as such because (white) liberal humanism persists in ways that make racism difficult to notice.

Although agency is motion that perpetually shifts relations, FNM scholars assume that ‘cuts,’ or processes that simplify the complexity of these ongoing movements, also occur. Any piece of scholarship, any conference, any organizing activity selects out particular relations as foci. This cutting activity, which separates some relations from others, is both productive—according to Barad (2007) it enables an “account of marks on bodies” (p. 348)—and problematic in that scholars and the systems that organize us often ignore the power-related and ethical implications of these cuts. These cuts are bound up in processes of gender, race, and sexuality. They “produce differences that matter” (Barad, 2007, p. 348). Accordingly, FNM scholars continuously ask questions that make cuts more noticeable, attend to the history of these cuts, and notice for whom or what the cuts are beneficial (van der Tuin, 2011). For example, Harris, McFarlane and Wieskamp (2019) showed that in the US military and higher education, agency appears to move *after* an episode of sexual violence, enabling multifaceted organizational responses. In contrast, cuts *during* assaults make it appear that agency resides only in one violent human. This separation of the perpetrator from other relationships makes it difficult to understand the enactment of sexual violence as an organizational problem, thereby focusing response efforts on expunging a handful of organizational members while maintaining a misogynist climate.

So, too, repeated cuts in our own processes leave Barad without relationships. Excluded are the racial, queer, and feminist transformations of those connections and histories of the theory. In the case of sexual violence above, congealed agency justifies expunging a few individuals from an organization without shifting the status quo. In a related move in our

scholarly organizing processes, Barad's congealed agency justifies the inclusion of an individual feminist new materialist absent their radical bedfellows.

Diffraction: Feminist New Materialism's Methodology

These core assumptions of FNM refigure traditional methodological approaches to process-based studies of power, organizations, and organizing. Instead of assuming that an object of study can be directly observed, FNM posits that only processes of relating and intra-acting can be observed. FNM methods focus on phenomena, not objects of study or stable entities. This methodology is dubbed diffraction, and it has emerged over several decades from multiple feminisms (e.g., Ferrando, 2012; Geerts & van der Tuin, 2016; Minh-ha, 1988). Under the principles of FNM, when a person observes waves in a pool, they are noticing not waves, but the phenomenon that results from gravity, global rotation, properties of water, wind, objects dropped into the pool, the toddler splashing around just out of sight, and words available to label the visible movements, among other relations. Moreover, the observation participates in the phenomenon. The person's breath, temperature, and magnetic field all become part of the relationships from which the waves emerge. For any given observation, the apparatus used to make the observation is part of the relations and intra-actions being studied, not separate from it.

A related methodological principle, *reflexivity*, has been present in qualitative research for some time. When performing reflexivity, scholars acknowledge how their subject positions influence what they notice in the world. To produce what S. Harding (1991) called strong objectivity—whereby knowledge claims become more objective when scholars account for their situatedness—researchers will notice the specific ways in which their own identities, experiences, and cultural locations inform their research design, analysis, and findings. Diffraction shares with reflexivity the notion that humans cannot stand fully apart from the world they seek to know. But diffraction differs from reflexivity in some important ways. In reflexivity, the end goal is to produce the least distorted version of the truth as possible. This goal presumes that representations of the world—claims about the world that are not also *in and of* the world—are possible. Diffraction, by contrast, does away with the possibility of representation and instead posits that all knowledge claims are fundamentally bound up in truth claims. Haraway (1997) said that diffraction is a “narrative, graphic, psychological, spiritual, and political technology for making consequential meanings” (p. 273). Further, it assesses “the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference” (p. 273). As with onto-epistemology and agency, the

concept of diffraction also does not escape the power dynamics it seeks to interrogate.

Discussing the term *situated knowledge*, an important precursor to contemporary iterations of diffraction, Watts (2013) declared that, while the concept could “change the imperialistic tendencies in Euro-Western knowledge production,” it simultaneously appropriates indigenous histories, turning them into a “story and process—an abstracted tool of the West” (p. 28).

Scholars across the critical humanities and social sciences have taken up diffraction (e.g., Sehgal, 2014; Ulmer, 2015; Warfield, 2016). Although every scholar who uses this method places concerns about power, difference, and oppression at the center of inquiry, sometimes the method’s own production of these power dynamics goes without mention. In the humanities, scholars practice re-reading (Grosz, 2010), a technique whereby they consider texts in relationship to one another in order to produce new insights. Noting this technique’s resonance with poststructuralist analytic approaches, namely Kristeva’s *intertextuality*, Wurth (2014) analyzed a book/artwork in which the writer/artist took an original medical textbook and then handwrote a copy of a novel on top of its original pages. In the process, some of the textbook and the copied novel became illegible. Wurth suggested that the writer/artist evoked the traditions of exalted medieval scribes and suspect forgers. The book/artwork elicits for those who encounter the altered text questions about duplication and uniqueness in an era where analogue writing, which requires touching the page, is rare. Further still, Wurth noted that the text overwritten on medical images functioned like tattoos, inking the illustrations of human bodies. And yet “the somatic trace of the author’s hand and fingers...signals absence” (p. 262): The visible bodies are mere illustrations, and the body of the novelist, the medical illustrator, and the artist are no longer present. Only “the impression of an embodied writing” remains (p. 270). Wurth’s analysis engages key FNM principles. It meditates on the shifting relations between flesh and text, challenges a divide between originals and copies, and makes claims that are only possible via interconnections and relationships to multiple phenomena.

These same principles guide diffraction in the critical social sciences. Lenz Taguchi and Palmer (2013) studied Swedish adolescent girls’ mental and physical illnesses in schools. They interviewed girls, asked them to take photos, and collected media stories about lack of health among school-aged young women. Lenz Taguchi and Palmer, likening their analytic technique to “surfing” and “zigzagging,” wove a story through these items and through FNM theory to show that, while girls’ illness in school is often associated with individual psychology or family

problems, well-being and illness can be linked to school architecture, the history of surveillance, television shows the girls' watch, the stories adults tell about girls, and the memories of both the researchers and the girls who they interviewed. Lenz Taguchi and Palmer used diffraction to intervene in a predominantly individualist understanding of girls—one that supports sexism and its links to paternalism—because it provides analytic tools to show complex relationships rather than isolated elements of a phenomenon.

In an organizational analysis that crosses the critical humanities and social sciences, Harris (2019) enacted diffraction to assess practices for reporting sexual violence on US college campuses. Methods employing a traditional subject/object split would attempt to mirror the world. They would assess how accurately college members identified reportable incidents and filed information with appropriate university offices. By contrast, diffraction marks “differences from within and as part of an entangled state” (Barad, 2007, p. 89). To do this, Harris showed that assaults and reports of assault intra-act, contrary to dominant understandings that separate violence from subsequent accounts of it. She considered federal laws, processes of trauma, racial inequity, uneven emotional labor, university attrition and enrollment, naming processes, and human perceptions of evidence to establish sexual violence as an ongoing organizational process, not a time-bound event. Taking up the FNM notion that knowledge claims are not distinct from reality, Harris showed how her own research was implicated in the processes of reporting sexual violence that she was studying, noting challenges she encountered while designing the study, organizational responses to the study's initial findings, and the impact of reporting processes on interviews.

In sum, we have detailed some of the historical and contemporary relations between Barad and other scholars or traditions to offer an account of processual power at work in organizational scholarship. We are suggesting that organization studies glosses these histories, complexities, and nuances when it defers difference. We are also suggesting that as FNM and this paper account for their production, we/they also make cuts that organize power. As FNM is currently cut, organization and management studies miss something crucial: The theory's ethics and politics, the very ‘things’ that make it about power. Barad and FNM account for not only the historical development of human exceptionalism, but how that exceptionalism has cozied up with patriarchy, homophobia, and white supremacy. When Barad, and thereby FNM, circulate without these key connections to difference, scholars study the process of power while making

an exact copy of it. These implications are not simply outcomes of powerful processes; they are part of the process of power itself. Thus, when difference is deferred in process-based approaches to power, we scholars maintain inequity without recognizing our practices as part of that process.

Affirming Difference: Processes for Doing Power Relationally

If cuts defer difference in process approaches to power, how might we get better at affirming difference? How might we cut power differently in management and organization studies? Our recommendations for how to theorize and, thus, enact power otherwise call for careful attention to and revision of our most basic scholarly practices. We speak here of the sort typically performed by occupational reflex, as if they are merely instrumental and politically neutral devices for conveying and supporting ideas. “Merely” is the operative word here: Of course these are expedient habits *and also*, as we have shown, significant methods by which persistent inequities of scholarly labor are made real.

Hence, we propose several habits for conceptualizing power that can counteract the three common moves documented in the first section, which—for recall—were (1) citing ‘single ladies’ thereby erasing relational thinking, (2) reinforcing the value of science over humanities through academic mansplaining, and (3) obscuring complexities such that FNM is reduced to a proxy for social construction. It may be useful to read the alternative habits we suggest below as progressive in a couple of ways: one habit enables the next, preparing us for greater levels of difficulty; and they move from minor adjustments to major shifts in practice, or from what might be called micro-tactics of theorizing to innovative modes of writing to a new communal orientation toward organization. What binds the alternative habits we propose is a guiding ethic of relationality—one that holds relational theories of power accountable to relational theorizing. Put another way, conceptions of power as processual should demonstrate reflexivity regarding the political process of conceptualizing. This ethic follows our earlier elaboration of Barad’s contribution to onto-epistemology. As noted there, Barad’s model invites us not to reduce power to an object of study but, rather, to notice how the studying itself enacts power and thereby contributes to making power real in particular ways. We have endeavored to model such reflexivity (albeit in moments, and imperfectly) in the paper thus far. Here, we sketch a broader agenda by which shared scholarly practices might rise to the daunting challenge of relationality and better account for themselves.

As one preparatory step to undermining the ubiquitous individual genius move, we might first simply *expand the range of apparent geniuses by actively citing beyond the usual suspects*. We are reminded of the “Matilda effect,” a gendering phenomenon whereby women scientists are less likely to be credited and cited than men (Rossiter, 1993). In our home discipline, scholars have demonstrated that white academics are over-cited, an observation circulating under the hashtag #CommunicationSoWhite (Chakravarty et al, 2018). By now, there are a host of movements afoot to increase the citation of othered and overlooked experts (e.g., www.womensmediacenter.com/shesource/ or, specific to the realm of intellectual production, www.citeblackwomencollective.org). But we wonder, in the field of organization and management studies, how often does writing pause to address its mundane implication in the homosocial reproduction of expertise? We know that the lineage of ideas is contested terrain, and that citation patterns often stand in for more careful, critical histories that can trace gendered, sexualized, and racialized practices of ascribing credit and influence. More to the relational point, citations are not so much *substitutes for* as they are *doings of* intellectual history that accumulate momentum and settle trajectories, often for years to come. Yet we know (from our own experience) that it is easy for citation to proceed as a reflex or an afterthought, under the duress of time and fatigue. Imagine the difference more conscious citation could make, not only by recognizing marginalized thoughts and voices as influential in published scholarship, but also by expanding the bodies and streams of thinking that flash to mind as featured conference panels take shape and lists of speakers or readings come together.

A second and deeper challenge to the individual genius, which moves in closer step with an ethic of relationality, would *acknowledge where genius is nurtured by emphasizing enabling relations* (e.g., the movement that nurtured the author, the network producing the apparent actor), *and (at)tending to how they are cut*. As a practical matter, of course enabling relations must be cut; but as with intellectual histories, they can be variously punctuated. The interesting question becomes, what is happening as we land on various punctuations, and how are they doing power? On the one hand, casting Barad as a physicist or quantum theorist, naturally affiliated with science and technology studies, can be read as a viable and harmless cut. As we have suggested, however, that punctuation also minimizes vital intellectual inheritances which Barad herself insists are integral, especially queer and feminist thinking. In this light, the typical cut of Barad’s enabling relations *does* a number of *things* to which FNM and its relationalities would

strenuously object. To name two, it nudges back open divides that Barad seeks to close and entirely upend (e.g., between nature and culture, natural and social sciences, science and humanities, knowledge and ethics); and it perpetuates the value and authority of real/hard or ‘mainstream’ (as in, broadly applicable) science by minimizing the clout of a ‘softer’ identity politics that seem to represent only the interests of marginalized groups rather than yield similarly encompassing theory. The main point is that how genius-enabling relations get cut *matters*, because intellectual agency—the influence of a movement such as FNM—is lost and gained in the process. The hope of this second habit, then, is to enhance both the presence and force of those enabling relations that are habitually minimized, like FNM, such that they too can become intellectual agencies.

If we keep multiple sets of enabling relations in the mix, we are better equipped for a third habit, which would *foster encounters among intellectual agencies that destabilize the current division and hierarchy of fields and open other possible relations*. This habit could tackle more directly the customary (longing for) affiliation with real/hard science. What difference might it make to draw upon Barad’s work as that of a physicist, a queer and feminist theorist, or a queer feminist physicist? It could rattle the rigid binaries that separate these fields, such that relations like general and specific, universal and particular, center and margin, objective and subjective, natural and cultural, material and social—start to shift around, becoming more fluid, temporary, vulnerable, and strange. Against the current tide of invoking Barad’s work in the service of ‘mainstream’ analyses of sociomateriality, we could invoke her embeddedness in FNM to create new relational account-abilities⁵ (i.e., both ability *and* responsibility to account for) that push back and in multiple directions. Consequently, we could begin to appreciate complexities currently denied to movements with minimized intellectual agency, such as FNM’s early contributions to upending divides between knowing and being, object and subject, material and social. Further, we might note how those FNM ideas depend upon decolonial thinkers and thinking. In this way, we might also redress the tendency to reduce minimized movements into an oversimplified proxy.

⁵ In an interview, Barad (2012a) described “response-ability” as a capacity to respond in a way that is “inviting, welcoming, and enabling other responses” (p. 77). The term is elaborated in many of Barad’s writings, and we are riffing on it here.

As an example, it might be helpful to take Nyberg's (2009) application of Barad's agential realism to practices at a call centre. Although he locates Barad's work in "feminist science studies," the discussion under this subheading quickly redirects away from gender and difference, or any ethical or political implications for that matter, and toward the ostensibly neutral question of how agentic cuts are made amid the entanglement of customer service operatives and computers. The ensuing empirical exercise sparks numerous inconsistencies, at least in part because it drops the impetus for and consequences of addressing agency in this way. The question of why and how sociomateriality "makes a difference," double meaning intended, is all but gone. The paper veers from a method of diffraction that centers unfolding sociomaterial relations of differentiation and power. Instead, it leans on an approach that preserves intact individual humans by placing them in the lead role of making cuts by making sense, all while attempting to minimize the researcher's influence on the scene. When Nyberg thus recenters human action while pretending that knowledge can be separated from its objects, social constructionism creeps back into a complex feminist model designed to complicate it. If organizational scholarship exploring relationality were expected, as a matter of course, to engage with the ethical and political imperatives of FNM—that is, if we were held account-able to engage with "nature's queer performativity" as much as a sanitized vocabulary of "intra-action"—it would become clear that the production of difference is indeed a universal issue that matters to theoretical physics as much as queer theory and organization studies alike. Accordingly, our sense of these and other intellectual agencies, and the relations among them, could begin to transform beyond the entrenched disciplines and hierarchies we now know.

Fortified with new capacity to loosen recalcitrant binaries, we could go further and *resist the continuing temptation to bolster claims through binary valuation*. Several feminist and critical race scholars have noted a pervasive tendency to formulate 'compelling' theory in binary terms laden with gendered, sexualized, and/or racialized overtones, such as hard-soft, active-passive, serious-frivolous, wild-domesticated, rational-emotional, and technical-intuitive (e.g., Ashcraft & Muhr, 2018; Harris, 2016b). A poignant example from relational conceptions of power can be found in affective approaches to organizational life. There, scholars regularly contrast affect with emotion in order to clarify and advocate for attention to affect *per se*. In this distinction, affect entails the raw, unfiltered flow of intensities among bodies, whereas emotion is a culturally and linguistically sifted state of experience. As helpful as some distinction might be,

the contrast is trending toward a rigid dichotomy, such that affect often appears as a wild, primitive, exotic, or virile force *against* the passivity of domesticated or civilized emotion (Thien, 2005). This binary tale of unruly against tamed feeling evokes a disturbingly familiar politics wherein white heterosexual masculinities stave off feminization through racialization and colonization (Ashcraft & Flores, 2003). Given that affect theory owes a major debt to critical race, queer, and feminist studies, which work to undermine such binaries, the dichotomy is all the more incongruous (Hemmings, 2005). The habit we advocate here would recognize that the binary valuation of ideas tends to revive stubborn inequalities with a fresh face. Suspicion and caution toward rigid, oppositional distinctions can help to unravel these patterns. For example, we could hold affect and emotion together, approaching their comparison gently and nimbly, as more-and-less rather than this-versus-that (e.g., Ngai, 2005).

Fifth, we can *cultivate new modes of scholarly writing that expand diffraction toward the practice of theorizing power*. The sort of relational approaches to reflexive writing that we have in mind are guided by an impulse to notice the affective politics upon which academic writing depends. Ashcraft's (2017) formulation of "inhabited criticism" provides one demonstration of how such alternative writing practices can proceed. There, she stages successive encounters with life in the so-called neoliberal university, first through vacated criticism (i.e., disembodied analysis), then humanized criticism (i.e., confessional tale) and, next, reciprocated criticism (i.e., toggling between dualisms like objective-subjective or macro-micro). After pausing to notice what sort of relations emerge in each writing practice, she enacts inhabited criticism as an alternative practice that can help us grapple with the demands and limitations of any mode of criticism, while also contending with the intimate relation between scholarly theories and practices of power. In other words, inhabited criticism facilitates a capacity to examine 'home' and 'field' at once—that is, the relations of power perpetrated in the act of knowing power elsewhere.

Finally, to stop deferring and start affirming difference, we could *own, as a field, that 'organization' is a historical formation inherently encumbered with oppressive relations*. If we begin with this understanding of that which we study and do, difference becomes pivotal to and constitutive of inquiry into power, rather than remaining an offshoot or special, marginal interest. Yet theories of power in and around organizational life, including the recent rise of processual approaches, routinely imply the gender, sexual, and racial neutrality of organization, such that it

remains possible and acceptable to address these as specific or occasional concerns. While it is commonly assumed that organizing is about power, class persists as the defining mode of capitalism, and other axes of difference appear subsidiary. Indeed, this is what Acker (1990, 1996), who is well-known in our field railed against in her rousing assertion that organization is a fundamentally gendered and raced structure and practice. It is the same argument so many scholars, less-well recognized in management, have demonstrated both before and since (e.g., Ahmed, 2012). But as in our earlier references to slavery, colonization, and other violent administrations of difference, we can wade even deeper into such assertions by going historical and tracking the contemporary presence of those violences.

For example, one of the authors (Ashcraft, 2019) examined the rise of hoarding, or the act of amassing an excess of material things with little or no apparent value, to an extent that normal practices of living are compromised by incapacitating clutter. Asking how disorder became a disorder in contemporary capitalist societies, she revealed the enduring centrality of gender, sexuality, and race to the cultural imperative for organization. She demonstrated that the eternal threat of disorganization vents a fear of difference gone wild and, especially, anxiety about the rise and spread of feminized, queer, dark, and/or foreign bodies. She revealed the very quest for organization as a mandate to produce and control difference through the regulation of affect—specifically, through the routinized capacity to set swift boundaries between human and non- or less-than-human bodies, between bodies of relative worth and waste. The analysis suggested that relations of difference are even more, and differently, constitutive of capitalist organizing than previously considered. If organization is the regulation of difference, organization studies is an inquiry into how difference becomes (dis)organized.

Before concluding, we pause for a moment to reflect on how these habits materialize in this text. We are still developing this work, and so we hope readers will help us to notice these habits (and, importantly, their absences) in our own writing, and perhaps in theirs. In the section titled “Why are these Deferrals of Difference Important?” we cited beyond the usual suspects and emphasized enabling relations. Scholars interested in utilizing Barad’s key terms might use the references in that section along with or in place of Barad. At the same time, by extensively citing *our* publications and providing examples from them, we have underplayed the relations from which our own thinking emerges. In so doing, we risk obscuring how our authorial power has been organized through whiteness. That risk can limit our ability to enact the final habit that

contends with organization as oppressive relation. Regarding the habit of resisting binary valuation, we are not yet sure how this piece grapples with that system. We are clear, however, that in attempting the fifth habit—writing diffractively—we are doing the thing we are studying.

Conclusion

As we said at the outset, studying a process involves making, at least temporarily, some ‘things.’ In the midst of constantly shifting connections, relational studies make cuts and thereby materialize less processual, but still fleeting, entities. Sometimes, scholars and entire academic fields get caught in the illusion that these temporary cuts are stable and enduring, ontological features of the topic in question, not onto-epistemological relations in the midst of becoming. Mistaking moving relations as solid and inevitable structures, they/we stop thinking about and noticing the processes that make (and simultaneously do) the ‘thing’ they (and we) study. The processes that make us and do us as researchers get separated from the processes that make and do what we research. When relational reflexivity, diffractivity, thus stops in processual approaches to power, so too does difference recede. The ‘thing’ we make and do becomes merely a repetition of already sedimented relations.

But Barad and FNM offer tools for destultifying academia. They suggest that scholarship entails not merely identifying the cuts that *make* things, but noticing how those cuts also *do* things. Toward this aim, FNM scholarship asks, “Which cuts are made, when, and for whom?” (van der Tuin, 2011, p. 37). In this paper, we have argued that Barad is cut—made and done—in organization and management studies in ways that serve the people and processes already in power. This outcome is not inevitable. Using FNM principles, we re-relationalized FNM to show not only *what* is missing in the cuts that have made Barad a ‘thing’ for organization studies, but *why* and *how* the missing relations can and should matter for studies of power.

The importance of these missing relations, these deferred differences, extends beyond scholars and scholarship that focus on power. Organization and management scholars cite Barad liberally to bolster analytic claims about everything from tourism (Orlikowski & Scott, 2015), to forest fires (Whiteman & Cooper, 2011) to innovation at Xerox (Suchman, 2005). At surface, these topics have little to do with difference or even power, but the theory producing insights about them emerged from queer, feminist, and decolonial thinking. This broad influence of FNM, though rarely named as such, opens a possibility for affirming difference. Though the explicit queer/feminist contents and context has, rather problematically, dissolved in those

studies, we nonetheless offer this provocation: Scholars are able to employ FNM and its relational cousins so prolifically only because *organization is a fundamentally queer, feminist process*. Difference is a constitutive feature of organization and management studies, and if we continue to defer it, we fail to process the power of our field.

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