

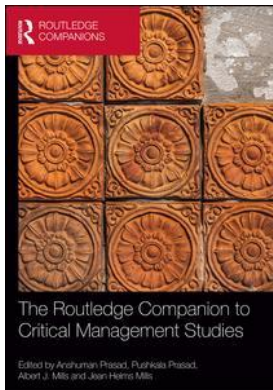
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## **The Routledge Companion to Critical Management Studies**

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### **Fringe benefits? Revisi(ti)ng the relationship between feminism and Critical Management Studies**

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## Part III

# Difference, otherness, marginality

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# Fringe benefits? Revisi(ti)ng the relationship between feminism and Critical Management Studies

*Karen Lee Ashcraft*

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Scholars affiliated with Critical Management Studies (CMS) debate many things, but few would contest that concern for power at work distinguishes the enterprise. Most would likely concur that relations of power have long been configured and exercised around human difference – social identities like gender, race and class, for instance. In this respect, feminist scholarship is a natural ally of CMS. We might reasonably expect feminist theory to be among the major resources on which CMS scholars draw and to which they actively contribute. All the more so, since feminist scholars and activists have interrogated the political character of organizing for nearly 50 years and, in that time, have experimented extensively with alternative ways to enact power and participation (see Ferree & Martin, 1995).

Yet contrary to expectation, feminist theory, research, and practice do not figure so prominently in CMS. Indeed, gender and other matters of difference beyond class, as well as feminist accounts of them, remain on the fringes of CMS. In the first half of the chapter, I substantiate this argument, weaving personal experience with quantitative and qualitative evidence in order to characterize with more nuance the current relation between CMS and feminism. The second half demonstrates how feminism's peripheral status is accomplished in routine discursive habits. The chapter concludes by considering implications for how we might go about revising this relation.

## **Feminism on the fringe: Reviewing the evidence**

Several caveats are in order first. Although I refer throughout to 'feminists,' 'feminism' and 'feminist scholarship' as recognizable entities, it is vital to acknowledge that feminist studies, like CMS, comprises multiple and competing philosophies (i.e., feminisms). Most of these place gender at the crux of analysis, and this chapter does the same. That said, many feminists urge us to examine gender as it is entangled with other social identities, such as sexuality, race, ethnicity, nation, class, age, ability and religion (e.g., Crenshaw, 1991; Fenstermaker & West, 2002). This call rightly holds us accountable to specify '*which* women and men' or 'what precise sort of gendered bodies,' '*whose* feminism' or 'feminism in the service of what particular interests?' Even as this chapter privileges gender, I do not mean to minimize such imperative questions. Indeed, the sort of criticism I conduct here can be applied to the chapter itself; for, in casting the spotlight on gender,

I effectively streamline the argument *and* commit some of the very sins of exclusion I seek to challenge. For example, the chapter normalizes Western relations and theories of gender and organization. Moreover, the marginalization of gender in CMS pales in comparison to that of race, sexuality, ability and, frankly, most other dimensions of difference.

Two final caveats follow from these observations. The first is that my intent is to stimulate an open, nuanced dialogue about the status of feminism in CMS, *not* to render a definitive portrait of their relation or to depict it as more pressing than other relations of power. Second, readers may note that I employ the term ‘Critical Management Studies’ to signal both broad and narrow meanings. In the former sense, it refers to a loose community of scholars and texts whose aims regarding organization may be fairly described as critical, radical, progressive, reformist, de- and reconstructive in some way – that is, focused on critique and revision of extant power relations toward enhanced equity or empowerment. Such a broad meaning includes authors and works aligned with these pursuits, even if they are not regularly or formally identified with the CMS moniker. In the narrow sense, CMS refers to a group of scholars and associated texts that not only explicitly identify with the acronym and related professional projects, associations and gatherings but that also support the making and maintenance of a CMS ‘canon,’ often serving custodial roles. This narrow group of CMS scholars is sometimes referred to as the Manchester School of CMS (see the introductory chapter in this volume by Prasad, Prasad, Mills & Helms Mills). The reflection and critique I undertake in this chapter are mostly addressed to the narrow sense of the term.

As these qualifiers suggest, I make a number of analytical ‘slices’ in aspiring to deliver a brief yet coherent case. However necessary, these inevitably cut the complexity endemic to the issues at hand. What follows is an admittedly vulnerable depiction. I welcome the chance to restore complexity as other voices join the conversation.

### *Starting at home: Sifting through personal experience*

Because my own experience formed the impetus for this chapter, I begin with related context. For some 20 years, my work has entailed theorizing, researching and teaching about gender and organization. Like many feminist scholars of my generation, my conception of gender has expanded over time to include an array of intertwining differences. Of particular interest to me are the ways that gender, race, class and sexuality function simultaneously to organize our work lives, especially occupational identities and organizational forms.

Crucial to situating my analytic voice is that I do this work from the ‘home field’ of organizational *communication* studies. I came of age as a scholar when gender and feminism were just beginning to appear on the register of organization studies in both the communication and management disciplines. Several well-intentioned mentors discouraged me from studying ‘tangential’ topics; one proposed that I begin my career with a more established focus and turn to gender once my reputation was secure. When it came to the marginal status of gender and feminism, I suspect communication and management studies were not so different at that time.

In the communication discipline, however, my timing proved ripe with opportunity to participate in shaping a new area of inquiry. Burgeoning interest became an established arena, such that today, gender and feminist scholarship enjoys a comfortable home in organizational communication studies. In fact, interpretive, critical and feminist approaches are regarded by most as mainstream and by some as even dominating the field. In significant part, this occurred because several leading scholars actively embraced the rise of diverse approaches and institutionalized related conferences, thereby creating the discursive and material conditions wherein audience and legitimacy were readily negotiable. In any case, one would now be hard pressed to support

a claim that feminism teeters on the margins of organizational communication; it is at least on par with other perspectives. This is the basis of comparison from which I encountered CMS.

One of the first ironies I observed, which continues to strike a chord in my experience of CMS, is that a field premised on the study of power and the pursuit of emancipation feels somehow ambivalent about gender equality. Not long after I began to engage with CMS, I encountered a conversation that has since been repeated over time and space. This itinerant conversation typically arises among feminist-sympathetic scholars (often, though not always, women), and it concerns the status of gender and feminism across CMS endeavors, from published scholarship to event programming, from professional interaction to after-hours socializing. It was in this conversation that I learned I am not alone (a) when I notice the many venues that still feature only white male experts, (b) when I am asked to recommend ‘good women’ worthy of such venues, (c) when I am charged to represent the ‘special interest’ of gender, (d) when I see brown women predictably tasked with serving up intersectional or postcolonial feminism, (e) when I heed the particular sort of masculine ethos that tends to script intellectual exchange and (f) when I squirm at the sexualized, (hetero)sexist banter that suffuses much social exchange, even as I liberally partake in it. Until hearing others’ stories of similar encounters, I did not trust my own. After all, I know that I am complicit in these dynamics. I profit from them, to some extent, and could certainly resist with greater vigor. Of course, most work environments are riddled with similar practices. It may be a sense of hypocrisy that intensifies their sting in CMS: if only we did not claim to do otherwise, to be authorized critics of politics elsewhere, to be gender-conscious, on board with feminism.

For me, this hushed, evolving conversation came to a head with *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Management Studies* (Willmott, Bridgman & Alvesson, 2009), for which I was invited to write the chapter on ‘gender and diversity.’ Even as I am still pleased to be part of the volume, it gnaws at me that such a hefty anthology does not contain a single chapter on feminist theory and only one on difference, charged with lumping together all such matters (i.e., ‘. . . and diversity’). In the chapter, I made a few veiled observations on this point and otherwise plodded through. Nonetheless, this was a final straw that prompted a more systematic investigation.

### *Fit to print: ‘Counting’ the published evidence*

To determine whether the *Handbook* was idiosyncratic in its treatment of feminism, gender and difference – or if perhaps I had missed something by looking for devoted chapters – I first consulted five volumes widely regarded as major CMS works: (1) *Critical Management Studies* (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992); (2) an updated version of the original collection, *Studying Management Critically* (Alvesson & Willmott, 2003); (3) *Critical Management Studies: A Reader* (Grey & Willmott, 2005); (4) *Power and Organizations* (Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips, 2006); and (5) *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Management Studies* (Willmott, Bridgman & Alvesson, 2009). All but one are edited anthologies; *Power and Organizations* serves as an advanced textbook guide to major concepts and theories informing critical perspectives on power.

The original *CMS* (1992) barely nods to gender or feminism; only the chapter on pleasure seeks to weigh such matters. Change seems afoot in the *Studying* update ten years later, which includes a new chapter on feminism. Read more closely, however, this chapter confirms the peripheral standing of feminist theory in CMS and suggests potential points of alliance to be cultivated. Out of nearly 20 chapters, the *Reader* includes one on sexuality. Across nearly 400 pages of *Power and Organizations*, little if any mention of gender or feminist theory can be found, such that neither warrants an entry in the index. As noted earlier, *The Oxford Handbook* contains a single chapter on gender and diversity out of almost 30. Feminist theory does receive cursory

mentions in Chapters 2, 7, 8, 13, 17 and 23. For example, Chapter 7, which theorizes power, is authored by one of the most prolific gender theorists in CMS. Initially, the chapter implies that feminist theory is central to critical conceptions of power, yet goes on to mention feminism only briefly, as it attests to strengths and limitations in Foucauldian analysis. References to feminism in the other listed chapters are as or more perfunctory.

Next, I searched the past decade (2000–2010) of works in six journals known to publish CMS scholarship: (1) *Organization Studies* (OS), (2) *Human Relations* (HR), (3) *Organization*, (4) *Culture & Organization*, (5) *Ephemera* and (6) *Tamara*. I sifted through all titles and abstracts and, where still uncertain, the actual text of articles to discern whether they featured gender as a focus and/or feminist theorizing as a perspective. As with the preceding books, my goal was to identify with greater clarity the relative amount of work occupied with gender and feminist issues, as well as any evident patterns in the publication of such work.<sup>1</sup>

Over a 10-year period, articles that emphasized gender accounted for 2–3% of *Organization Studies* content (i.e., 10 articles over 10 years, adjusted for shifting publication rate) and 4–5% of *Human Relations* content (i.e., 25 articles in 10 years, adjusted for higher, steady publication rate). Whereas most of the OS articles employ feminist perspectives, few of the HR pieces do. Articles in HR appear more likely to examine gender phenomena (e.g., wage difference) through other theoretical lenses. Both journals are loosely regarded as ‘critical-friendly,’ though this is, of course, a contested marker, but they are neither expressly nor exclusively so.

Turning to those journals that are avowedly critical, 6–8% of *Organization* content (i.e., 25 articles in 10 years, adjusted for several irregularities in publication rate) accentuated gender, and most of these works employed feminist perspectives. It is worth noting that the editors during this period were leading feminist scholars in the CMS community. Over the same decade, around 7% of *Culture & Organization* content highlighted gender and feminism; notably, however, this figure includes a special issue devoted to “gender and organization culture.” Same with *Tamara* (7–8%), whose higher percentage is heavily influenced by a special issue on “critical feminism,” which hosted over half of its total gender/feminist articles for the 10-year period. For *Ephemera*, the figure was back down to 4%, and few of these articles addressed feminist theory per se.

Finally, I combed these journals for symposia about CMS and identified three: (1) the August 2002 issue of *Organization*, (2) the September 2007 issue of *Organization Studies*, and (3) the November 2008 issue of *Organization*. The first presents Mayer Zald’s keynote talk from the CMS workshop at the 2001 Academy of Management (AOM) conference, as well as several responses and a rejoinder. Zald’s speech briefly mentions feminist theory in reference to critical developments in other professional (read ‘not business’) schools but does not cite feminism as part of the history, present or future of CMS. Only one other response (Adler, 2002) addresses feminist theory, and I return to this later.

The second symposium debates the “cleavage” in CMS between Marxist and poststructuralist orientations. It features all male authors, and none of the commentaries consider gender, much less how feminist theory contributes to the debate. In contrast, the third symposium demonstrates heightened consciousness of difference, motivated by the convener’s “particular concerns . . . about class, affluence, locality, masculinity and age, and the way these play out in CMS career paths and practices” (Cooke, 2008: 912). This passage goes on to explain the inclusion of contributors beyond the usual CMS suspects. Some of these authors urge CMS to rectify a tendency to privilege voices that are overwhelmingly white, Western and/or Northern, and masculine. One of the more usual suspects in the exchange (Willmott, 2008) is the only contributor to discuss feminist theory, another instance to which I later return.

At least two other developments are worth noting for their potential influence on these overall findings. One is the rise of a new journal in 1994 – *Gender, Work, and Organization* – which

supplies a separate, devoted space for gender and feminist organization and management scholarship. The concentration (ghettoization?) of such theory and research in an isolated, specialized journal merits further dialogue. We may dispute whether this is positive and/or negative, as well as how it reflects institutional and market forces and/or personal and collective preference. Either, both or some other way – the answer does not relieve us of questioning the condition. A second development is a decided shift in feminist theorizing from the GDO (Gender and Diversity in Organizations) to the CMS division of AOM. The history, politics and interaction of both developments are beyond the scope of this chapter, but they surely merit reflection in future dialogue.

Summarizing my findings of frequency and pattern, we can make three broad observations. First, major CMS volumes include gender and/or feminism in highly circumscribed ways or not at all, despite the canonizing function of such works. Second, overall journal coverage appears to hover around 5% for gender, less for feminist theory, albeit with variation among journals (e.g., slightly more in explicitly critical journals, particularly those with feminist editors and/or related special issues). Finally, CMS symposia barely nod to gender and feminist theory, if at all, although the most recent instance suggests rising attention to issues of difference more broadly. It seems safe to say that the marginal status of feminism is more than impression and anecdote. By multiple measures, feminism remains peripheral to the CMS core.

Let this preliminary conclusion be misconstrued – to imply that a certain higher percentage of feminist inclusion would resolve the need for concern, for instance – I underscore now a point I elaborate later: I am arguing that feminism is among those voices that belong in the bustling hub of CMS conversation and that, despite common claims that it is already well integrated, this is not so. I am *not* arguing that feminism deserves a larger, fixed share of the CMS ‘pie.’ Such territorial claims evoke a zero-sum model of the CMS enterprise that is counterproductive and precisely what I argue against, as explained in the section on discursive device 2 later in this chapter.

### *Core and periphery: Hearing the critique*

Of course, this is hardly the first criticism of marginality in CMS. As part of my investigation, I gathered reviews of the previously examined major volumes (e.g., Ackroyd, 2004; Costas, 2010; Ferdinand, Muzio & O’Mahoney, 2005; Prasad, 2008), as well as individual articles that primarily reflect upon CMS as a field (e.g., Brewis & Wray-Bliss, 2008; Fournier & Grey, 2000; Spicer, Alvesson & Kärreman, 2009; Wray-Bliss, 2004), much like the collective symposia considered earlier. Read together, these commentaries converge on two forms of exclusion: content and voice.

A first area of critique surrounds what counts in CMS as central topics and theoretical, epistemological and methodological lenses. Prasad (2008), for example, observes that the *Reader* is strikingly devoid of “race, ethnicity, workplace diversity, multiculturalism, (neo-)colonialism, imperialism, Eurocentrism, postcolonial theory, queer theory, subaltern, and so on” (p. 282). Likewise, but more generically, Ferdinand, Muzio and O’Mahoney’s (2005) review of *Studying Management Critically* finds that the volume “ends up imposing, against its stated objectives, and artificial closure of criticalness. . . . A broader and more inclusive approach . . . would have provided a better foundation . . .” (pp. 1715–1716).

A second area of critique entails questions of voice or representation – namely, who is represented in and by CMS (i.e., who is it about/for, or what we might call the ‘object’ voice), and who is hosting these representations (i.e., who does CMS, or the ‘subject’ voice). Speaking to the former, Ackroyd’s (2004) review of *Studying* notes the volume’s narrow focus on a small selection of professionals:



What strikes one forcibly about this, of course, is the combination of a very limited purview, and the totalising claims that are made off the back of them. The powers often attributed to what are, after all, very limited sections of the professional and managerial class (to say nothing of the total working population), are extraordinary indeed . . . even taking all of the occupations considered in this book for the UK . . . the ideas of less than 5% of the working population of the country are considered.

(pp. 167–168)

Similarly, Ferdinand, Muzio and O'Mahoney (2005) critique *Studying* for addressing a limited set of profession(al)s and failing to acknowledge this focus as a defining aspect of the CMS project.

Turning to the dimension of subject voice, Prasad (2008) characterizes the *Reader* as a "restricted segment of scholarship – occurring primarily, though certainly not exclusively, within metropolitan Anglophone academic circles" (p. 279). Wray-Bliss (2004) and Brewis and Wray-Bliss (2008) critique the privileging of academic over non-academic voices, arguing for the extension of political consciousness and reflexivity into CMS empirical studies.

Of particular relevance to the present chapter, feminist critiques of CMS have begun to emerge as well, formalizing the roving conversation described earlier. Most of these efforts have so far occurred at conferences. I participated, for example, in a 2005 AOM session on the status of feminist theory in management studies. Although the session emphasized the major academy journals and the GDO division, concerns regarding relations with CMS surfaced as well. A CMS professional development workshop at the 2006 AOM meeting, entitled "The Uneasy Marriage of Feminism and CMS," explored these concerns in depth. The session interrogated gender relations within the CMS community, including specific trends noted earlier: for example, how feminist scholarship tends to take backstage to 'regular' critical scholarship, how it became isolated within specialized venues like *GWO*, how it shifted from GDO to CMS as a primary community of practice, and how CMS 'classics' and 'experts' continue to be aligned with a predictable form of white masculinity. I review these prior critiques because the ensuing analysis follows in their footsteps.

### **Left to our own discursive devices: How CMS claims feminism and keeps her in her 'rightful' place**

Thus far, I have explored the contours of the CMS–feminism relation from three angles: personal experience and observations, relative volume of and patterns in published scholarship and extant criticisms of exclusivity and marginality. My goal has been to substantiate and explicate feminism's peripheral status in CMS. As just noted, feminist critics have begun to raise kindred questions, surfacing the tense relation between feminism and CMS, offering explanations as to why it occurs and recommending ways we might change it. In collaboration with their efforts, I take a somewhat different tack next.

Specifically, I apply my 'home' disciplinary training in communication analytics in order to illuminate *how*, rather than *why*, the feminism–CMS relation is discursively constituted and maintained as one of periphery to core. As I conducted the analysis for the first half of this chapter, what particularly caught my eye were the repetitive sleights of hand<sup>2</sup> whereby gender and feminism seemed to recede 'naturally' into the wings. Below, I identify five of these. To be clear, I am not interested in claims regarding individual or collective intention; rather, I situate the five 'tricks' as communal discursive practices that many of us (myself included) perpetrate and accept as a matter of reflex. My hope is that exercising an astute eye for these habits can help us to recognize

and resist them in the routine moments of their operation and develop discursive countertactics. As you will see, some aspects of the five habits are gender and feminist specific, but many pertain to other forms of exclusion as well, such as those Prasad (2008) just enumerated.

### *1: Nominal inclusion negated by exclusionary narrations of history*

In the discourse of CMS, gender and feminisms are regularly embraced as an integral part of the enterprise. Adler's (2002) response to the Zald symposium begins by quoting the CMS divisional mission: "We aim to foster critiques coming from labor, feminist, anti-racist, ecological . . ." (p. 387). Likewise, Fournier and Grey's (2000) touchstone article cites sexism as a motivating concern and lays claim to feminism as one of several philosophical positions characteristic of CMS. Yet the evolution of CMS charted in the essay treats neither sexism nor feminism as pivotal players. In their introduction, Spicer, Alvesson and Kärreman (2009) identify "feminist organization studies" as one among several key "attempts to question management," which "are now brought together under the banner of CMS" (p. 538). The subsequent history they chart, however, has nothing to do with feminist organization studies.

History is relevant in at least two ways here. The first entails whether gender and feminism are identified as part of the *catalyst* or impetus for the development of CMS, part of its 'conditions of possibility.' Rarely are discussions of how CMS came about linked to gender struggle, feminist activism, or feminist theoretical developments, much less to that surrounding other differences like race. If gender, race or other differences are mentioned, they are typically subsumed into the larger cultural milieu of political unrest that motivated CMS but *not* included as part of the subsequent core theory. Zald (2002), for example, mentions civil rights and antiwar movements as significant stimuli for the surge of CMS in the U.S. context, but he does not include critical race theory or peace studies as significant bodies of theory in CMS; nor does he mention gender and feminism, except for later reference to critical legal studies and other professional schools that faced pressure to make room for feminist critique.

As that suggests, a second way history is relevant involves whether gender and feminism are included in the *classics* or intellectual lineage of CMS. Rarely are feminist ideas, theories and theorists touted as influential in the development of CMS conceptions of power and resistance. For a quick taste of the partial historical narrative of CMS that is reproduced across major volumes, collective symposia and individual commentary articles, visit the Wikipedia entry for CMS, at least at the time of this writing.

### *2: Feminism framed as a specific subset or parallel track of CMS, which is framed as a general, encompassing enterprise*

In the third CMS symposium just described, Willmott (2008) explains:

Consider, for example, how feminist ideas and modes of organizing have been central to the UN world conferences on women and the Latin American Feminist encuentros and also to NGOs doing popular education around women's human rights . . . In a similar register *but on an even wider terrain*, it is possible to connect key elements in the CMS Domain Statement to the aspirations of the Global Justice Movement which emphasize the importance of self-determination as an alternative to continued dependence upon corporate patronage or marginalization.

(p. 928; *emphasis added*)

This excerpt is useful for tracing the subtle ways in which feminism is both celebrated *and* relegated to a secondary seat, the concern of “women’s human rights” (presumably narrow terrain because it does not apply to those for whom gender is not a problem – i.e., those privileged by gender?). Other forms of justice, it seems, are more universal in their reach, though presumably they, like feminism, seek to intervene in interdependent relations of advantage and disadvantage that touch us all. Similarly, Spicer, Alvesson and Kärreman (2009) say of Judith Butler’s feminist/queer theoretical contributions: “Butler’s *particular* concern is how discourses of gender and sexuality are made performative” (p. 544; emphasis added). They go on to apply Butler’s performativity to an array of discourses that concern CMS, of which gender is one strand. Jacques (2006) puts the general–specific relation most bluntly: “Within the Academy of Management at the present time, feminist theorizing and critical systems of thought are not in opposition. Rather, the former is a more specific case, the latter a more general case, of the same problem – the discursive neutering of incommensurable difference.”

I hasten to spell out what I am *not* claiming here: that gender and feminism should somehow take their rightful, permanent place on the CMS center stage. On the contrary, I *am* claiming that:

- 1 If we take the emancipatory aims of CMS seriously, we should be wary of a fixed center stage, or ‘core’;
- 2 There is no generic approach to power against which feminism is a special interest, unless you begin with the (antifeminist, or at least not so feminist) premise that it is viable to proceed as if there are nongendered subjects;
- 3 If we really wish to play the what-encompasses-what game (and we should not: it is futile and destructive), gender is as much an omnipresent feature of power relations as any, unless one erroneously reduces gender to the province of those categorized as women (even so, 51% of the population hardly seems ‘narrow?’); and
- 4 The narrative of CMS history that currently masquerades as general or universal (exemplified on Wikipedia) is far from both; it simply fails to concede and interrogate its own partialities.

In sum, it is not that I seek a greater share of fixed territory for gender and feminism, which would succeed only in edging out other vital concerns. As noted earlier, a zero-sum image of the CMS ‘pie’ promotes a competition that ultimately helps no one. Rather, the problem I see is that foreground and background, core and periphery, general and specific, so rarely shift around, as confirmed by my earlier frequency findings. I do not recall ever reading or hearing that “neo-Marxist labour process theories represent the ‘special interest’ of class and furnish one narrow lens through which we might understand broader relations of gendered power at work” (she says facetiously). Instead, the steady CMS script depicts such labor process theories as ‘our’ home, ‘our’ genesis – as if ‘we’ share a common origin, as if that is a good or necessary thing. I am advocating, then, for a more genuine ‘heterarchy’<sup>3</sup> of interests and influences – the sort we often evoke in our opening characterizations but negate in our expositions.

Elsewhere, Dennis Mumby and I (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004) elaborate the problems with depicting feminism as derivative of CMS, as playing a specific, supporting role (i.e., the Eve to CMS’s Adam). Such depictions punctuate temporal, spatial and intellectual boundaries in a way that ensures feminism will continue to appear subsidiary, ‘naturally’ second fiddle. These depictions eclipse how feminist organization scholarship responds to a history of its own, which gives it distinctive contours that are broadly, not narrowly useful.

A slight variation on this discursive device highlights another aspect of the general–specific relation. Here, feminism is framed as one of many parallel tracks on the broader path that is CMS.

This notion of CMS as an ‘umbrella’ for equivalent endeavors is evident, for example, in an earlier quote from Spicer, Alvesson and Kärreman (2009), who cast feminism as one of many “attempts to question management . . . now brought together under the banner of CMS” (p. 538). Under the heading, “In the Name of Whom,” Adler (2002) reports his preference for treating “capitalist, market-based form of society” as the object of CMS critique, on behalf of “working people.” Other “critters,”<sup>4</sup> he acknowledges, have different trajectories of concern. Feminists, for example, target patriarchy on behalf of gender interests; likewise, environmentalists have their agenda; and the list goes on. On the one hand, this characterization can be read as a commendable recognition that the dominant version of CMS, typically taken as *the* version (as previously demonstrated), is partial, one of many possible renditions. But, we must also ask, are not capitalism and “working people” gendered? Are gendered, capitalist formations not implicated in our relation with the natural environment? As feminist and other theorists have repeatedly pointed out, these are not parallel but intersecting tracks, so thoroughly interdependent that analysis in isolation is misguided. Adler acknowledges that “the debates here . . . are long-standing and difficult” yet critical to setting “common ground and basis for common action” (p. 390).

It is not enough, then, to say that there are specific renditions of CMS, each with its own concerns and classics, as if these can or should remain separate branches of shared emancipatory aims. Feminist and queer theories reveal how gender and sexuality are organizing principles of venerated CMS classics (e.g., Calás & Smircich, 1991), just as critical race and postcolonial theories reveal disturbing race-nation foundations embedded in much feminist theory (e.g., hooks, 1995). To stretch the metaphor, we do well when parallel tracks collide, rather than grant one another wide berth.

### 3: *Appropriation and omission of feminist contributions*

Spicer, Alvesson and Kärreman’s (2009) rethinking of ‘critical performativity’ offers five strategies whereby CMS scholars enact social change in their work. The related discussion does not acknowledge the considerable debt owed to feminist (among other) traditions for these strategies; they are instead presented as if discovered by, or the distinctive products of, the CMS community. Yet consider a few of the strategies more closely: an ethic of care, an affirmative epistemological stance that preserves and honors participant voices<sup>5</sup> and pragmatism with particular regard to alternative organizational forms and practices. These commitments have been at the heart of much feminist theory for some time, and feminist theorists have contributed significantly to, and in some cases led, their development (see Fine, 1993). But the discussion mentions feminist praxis only by way of “tempered radicalism,” drawing on a specific feminist project within CMS (Meyerson, 2001). As feminism is invoked only to illustrate approaches that pursue modest, incremental change, its deeply oppositional, revolutionary history of intervening in organization theory and practice – which spawned innovative pragmatic hybrids of form and from which CMS stands to learn a great deal – becomes obscured (see Ashcraft, 2006).

Similarly, we might ask why the considerable contributions of feminist theorists to debates surrounding Marxist and poststructuralist perspectives were not considered in the CMS “cleavage” symposium described earlier or why prominent CMS debates regarding discourse and materiality rarely include pertinent developments in feminist theory, such as feminist philosophy on the body and sexual difference, despite repeated calls from feminist CMS scholars to do so.

My argument, then, is that feminist scholarship is often absent from the critical discussions where it is most relevant and that this absence takes at least two forms: failing to adequately *consider* feminist contributions to the pivotal theoretical debates of CMS and failing to sufficiently *credit* feminism when its contributions are appropriated. In this sense, the third discursive device

can be seen in part as a consequence of the second: the boundaries of CMS history are routinely drawn in such a way that it is difficult to imagine independent feminist trajectories that inform CMS philosophy and practice; moreover, one does not need to.

#### *4: Selective representations of CMS identity simultaneously minimized as individual preference and authoritatively canonized*

In his review of the *Reader*, Prasad (2008) captures an uneasy tension in the way such anthologies tend to be introduced, at once with reassuring openness and insistence on closure. In the *Reader's* case, the editors begin by acknowledging that CMS is a robustly contested terrain, couching the volume as their own “fantasy football team” and apologizing for the inevitable exclusions wrought by personal preference. Soon after, the editors proceed to embrace the contents of the volume as fairly reflecting the core of CMS, and they gesture to the vital institutionalizing function such a volume can perform, enabling the maintenance of healthy academic community.

My own reading of CMS volumes, symposia and commentaries strongly concurs with Prasad's assessment that this tension abounds in CMS discourse. As in the *Reader*, slippage from openness to closure, from provisional to certain, occurs within single paragraphs, much less single essays. The cumulative effect is admittedly disarming: if we openly confess our exclusions, are we really committing them? Do they really require accounting? Prasad (2008) summarizes the problem:

Hence, in pointing to the exclusions, I do not object to the editors' leaving such issues out of their anthology; I merely draw attention to what the editors think is (un)important. However, it needs to be kept in mind that this anthology is also a part of the editors' declared project to institutionalize CMS – to draw boundaries that would define what is “inside” and/or “outside” this area of research – and, in so doing, to shape the future scholarly contours of this emerging genre. From a scholarly perspective, therefore, it would have been extremely useful had the book provided a cogent explanation as to why the editors believe their version of CMS (with its unique inclusions and exclusions) to be intellectually preferable to other possible versions that might *include* many of the themes and issues excluded from the *Reader*.  
(p. 282; original emphasis)

In short, the discursive tactic of individualistic transparency (e.g., “I freely admit this is just my view”) supplants critical dialogue about what CMS might in-/exclude and why. It softens and sweetens the otherwise sharp edge of transforming a partial agenda into an institutionalized canon. It helps the medicine go down, so to speak.

#### *5: Dominant CMS masculinity de-/recentered through focus on the plight of knowledge work/ers*

As noted earlier, critics have observed that CMS emphasizes a narrow set of occupations and practitioners – specifically, the managerial and professional classes, or what are today often hailed as ‘knowledge work/ers.’ In their review of *Studying*, Ferdinand, Muzio and O’Mahoney (2005) urge CMS to engage more fully and explicitly with the professions literature, since that appears to be the population of interest. In response, Willmott (2005) clarifies that professionals are not the focus of the CMS project but rather management practices. Since formal managers and nearby professionals are typically tasked with the development and implementation of such practices, it is reasonable to highlight organizational dynamics among these groups. But the formation, maintenance and transformation of professions per se are beyond the central scope of CMS.

Whether or not this is an adequate response for the critique made, it is less so if we lean into the critique. As previous critics have hinted (e.g., Ackroyd, 2004; Ferdinand, Muzio & O'Mahoney, 2005), comparatively privileged knowledge workers – that is, mostly white, Western, Northern, male and/or masculine and heterosexual – are the lead characters of CMS: sometimes as protagonists (e.g., targets, victims and resisters of managerial imperatives), sometimes antagonists (e.g., perpetrators, though often unwitting), and sometimes both – but commanding the spotlight on a regular basis, nonetheless. In the spirit of productive provocation, allow me to climb out further on this limb: I suspect it is no coincidence that this lead character is fashioned in the image of, or at least sympathetic with, the dominant masculine ethos evident within the CMS community – a kind of disgruntled, disaffected, ironic, cynical (often lubricated/medicated) competitive intellectual jousting among relatively privileged professionals. Might this be an instance of scholarly narcissism or homosocial desire (see Roper, 1996)? Whatever the case, the self-proclaimed core of CMS appears rapt in its own reflection yet unable (unwilling?) to see itself – that is, the striking resemblance between the lead characters in our work and the image in the mirror. Or perhaps what is seen in the mirror is a 'universal' human struggle (returning to the second discursive device), when it is anything but.

A poignant example of this discursive habit emerged at a recent workshop I attended designed to showcase new perspectives from a few leading as well as up-and-coming CMS scholars. Three speakers in a row employed a generic vocabulary: "the nature of work and organizations today," "the contemporary workplace," "the situation faced by today's workers" and so forth. But which workers, what sort of work, in what kinds of organizations? Without exception, every example referenced a kind of so-called knowledge worker – management consultants, computer programmers and high-level technicians, to name a few – with no caveat about the particular and relatively privileged set of conditions associated with this work. Are such workers subjected to contemporary regimes of managerial discipline? No doubt. Do they encounter significant struggles worthy of investigation? Of course. Are they generic, representative or even primary – in a word, *the* – victims of contemporary work and organizational power relations? No.

It is not sufficient, therefore, to say that we need not contend with the professions literature because that is not our central project. A more self-reflexive question might be, if that is not our central project, and if the brunt of management practices are born on Other<sup>6</sup> backs, why are these our lead characters? Here, I mean to merge two lines of critique noted earlier. Whereas others have criticized the limited 'objects' or 'subjects' of CMS (i.e., who it is about and who does it, respectively), I seek dialogue about their apparent alignment – the ways in which the subjects allegedly served by CMS reflect the interests of who does it.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued chiefly that, despite claims to the contrary, feminist theory and research remain on the fringes of CMS scholarship and that this problematic relation is routinely remade and obscured through a number of discursive tactics. I analyzed five, though these are by no means exhaustive, and I welcome challenges, revisions and additions to those identified here. In a thoughtful take on an earlier version of this chapter, for instance, one respondent wondered to what extent feminism remains on the margins because many men in CMS continue to experience pressure to stay away from participation in feminist theorizing. Challenges to the legitimacy of their feminism, he observed, can stem from an ironic convergence of discursive forces, as when the policing of rigid masculinity norms becomes allied with guarding who can 'rightfully' do feminist theory. This is precisely the sort of dialogue I hope to provoke with this chapter.

Meanwhile, we could begin to cultivate a number of practices in an effort to redress these habits, in addition to honing our recognition of the moments when they are in play and of our own participation. We could, for example, proceed as if feminism and other (more excluded) perspectives are legitimate origins for CMS, as indeed they are. Many of us came to this work through other philosophical and practical trajectories, on which we can draw to articulate alternative histories of CMS. These could foster a fuller heterarchy of interests, toying with relations of general and specific, foreground and background, core and periphery, in creative, productive and even playful ways.

With more histories in circulation, we would also be better positioned as a community to direct due attention and credit to a wider range of influences on CMS theory and praxis. An example of the sort of multivocal work this could promote can be found in a noteworthy exception to the trends previously analyzed: in their analysis of research ethics, Brewis & Wray-Bliss (2008) consider Critical Theory,<sup>7</sup> feminism and postcolonialism as three major ways that CMS scholars have grappled with ethical dilemmas in the research process. Contrasted with the tendencies of omission and appropriation analyzed in this chapter, this work models what it can look like to honor a diversity of trajectories *and* put them into conversation with one another, rather than holding them apart as viable yet parallel tracks.

Pursuing such intersections is especially crucial to politicizing our own scholarly relations. As it stands, the Manchester School brand of CMS is rarely called to practice self-reflexivity – to see itself through Others’ eyes, to explain canonical representations in vulnerable dialogue with those excluded from these depictions, to account for the resemblance of CMS ‘objects’ and ‘subjects’ and confront narcissistic desires at work in our own community. For feminist scholars and scholarship in particular, I seek a relation of mutual, sympathetic, productive agitation with the multiple constituents of CMS, wherein the very point of ‘our’ community is to enable such differences to collide, irritate and generate, among other things, rich comprehension of the intricate layers, tangles and ‘workings’ of organizational power. Such is how I understand and relate to the project of this book.

## Notes

- 1 The phrase “identify with greater clarity” (as opposed to “resolve with absolute precision”) is critical here. I happily concede the interpretive nature of my analytic process and the inevitable ambiguities that accompany it. First, the frequencies and patterns I found reflect a number of choices I made along the way – for example, journal selection, reliance on titles and abstracts, inclusion of only those works that explicitly invoke gender and/or feminism, judgments as to what distinguishes a “mention” from a “focus” (i.e., “intercoder reliability”), exclusion of book reviews and calculations of percentage based on the standard assumption of four or five articles per issue (e.g., 10 articles over 10 years, with 6 issues per year = 10 out of 240–300 articles, or 1 out of every 24–30 = 2–3%). Moreover, I adjusted my findings for journal variations. For example, most of the selected journals are published at different rates (e.g., monthly, bimonthly, quarterly, unevenly); and five out of six altered their publication rate during the decade in question. These changes and irregularities are factored into my calculations. In sum, I am confident that my findings reflect *both* the analytical choices I made *and* a reasonable correspondence with reality. They are, in other words, sufficiently accurate to support my claims *and* open to question. I welcome the productive debate that could follow comparison with similar analyses premised on different assumptions.
- 2 I do *not* make claims of intent here; I mean only to suggest a kind of “magical disappearance” whose subtlety takes at least some recognizable form and rhythm.
- 3 Here, I borrow a term from studies of feminist organization (e.g., Iannello, 1992): ‘heterarchy’ refers to shifting rather than fixed relations of power and priority, center and periphery, foreground and background.
- 4 For those less familiar, ‘critters’ is a term of endearment often used by CMS scholars and sometimes others to refer to members of the CMS community.

- 5 Obviously, many qualitative traditions have shared in the development of this epistemological commitment and related methodological practices.
- 6 The capitalization is intended here to signal that this generalized 'Other' hinges around many simultaneous forms of 'othering,' such as those of race, ethnicity, nation, gender, sexuality, ability, religion and so on.
- 7 Capitalization signals reference to the Frankfurt school and affiliated theorists.

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