



HAL
open science

Abjection overruled! Time to dismantle sexist cyberbullying in academia

Emmanouela Mandalaki, Mar Pérezts

► **To cite this version:**

Emmanouela Mandalaki, Mar Pérezts. Abjection overruled! Time to dismantle sexist cyberbullying in academia. Organization, 2021, 30 (1), 168-180 p. 10.1177/13505084211041711 . hal-04376055

HAL Id: hal-04376055

<https://hal.science/hal-04376055>

Submitted on 8 Jan 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial 4.0 International License

Abjection overruled! Time to dismantle sexist cyberbullying in academia

Organization
2023, Vol. 30(1) 168–180
© The Author(s) 2021



Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/13505084211041711
journals.sagepub.com/home/org



Emmanouela Mandalaki 
NEOMA Business School, France

Mar Pérezts 
OCE Research Center, Emlyon Business School, France

Abstract

In this essay, we draw on a personal experience of sexist cyberbullying unleashed, on social media, against one of our academic papers, to act up against increasing instances of cybersexism, in the academy. Reading our experience in the context of feminist insights on impurity and abjection, we assert the need to dismantle cybersexism targeting non-conforming academic knowledge, namely feminist. We also discuss the potentials of the cyberspace to provide opportunities for communal solidarity, as a source of empowerment for targets of academic cybersexism. Writing this text is an activist expression of voice and resistance, whereby we call our community to collective action and increased institutional support against sexism in academia, particularly in online spaces.

Keywords

Abjection, academia, acting up, activist writing, cyberbullying, cybersexism, cybersolidarity, unsilencing

March 31st 2021, midnight. I see a colleague's message that a professor from another institution and country seems interested in one of my papers: he publicized posts on Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook. I feel flattered but haven't seen the posts. My colleague soon writes again that after a careful look, he realized that this person was actually 'ridiculing' my work. I am not even active on

All authors equally contributed and are listed alphabetically.

Corresponding author:

Mar Pérezts, OCE Research Center, Emlyon Business School, 23 Avenue Guy de Collongue, Ecully 69134, France.
Email: perezts@em-lyon.com

social media but my 'body' of work is bullied, 'liked' and 'disliked' within these cyberspaces, in ways that I cannot even know of, let alone control. How naïve I was. I am still young in academia, I guess. But, I am learning. The hard way.

*But what are we **learning**, exactly? To keep quiet, get in line and apologize? We're taught, as girls, to not respond when we're treated wrongfully: 'Just ignore him, he'll eventually get tired and leave you alone'. But, should we ignore this? Naivety here would be ignoring the incident, silencing, or changing our research.*

As we read the thread of the online mockeries, we realized that the comments did not only attack one of our critical articles recently published in this journal (Mandalaki and Pérezts, 2020), but also other critical works seen as destabilizing the power structures sustaining the academic status quo.

So, let us begin by calling things by their proper, blatant, unsanitized name. Publicly 'ridiculing' academic publications as well as the work of authors, editors and reviewers, on social media, as in our case, is called academic cyberbullying (Cassidy et al., 2017; Lloro-Bidart, 2018). It is not just 'a trivial critique', which does not warrant making 'a fuss' about it, and certainly not a '4/1 [April fool's] joke', as some Twitter replies suggested. This is a sexist cyberattack against different forms of knowledge.

We discuss our recent experience to argue that it is time to act up against academic sexism, particularly in online spaces, where sexist cyberbullying is becoming a frequent phenomenon. In a context where our academic institutions, society and even ourselves become increasingly tolerant, and complicit to such attacks often letting them 'pass' unchallenged and undenounced, we argue that it is our responsibility, as academics, to assert a professional work ethics whereby such behaviour is unacceptable:

'There's enough room for all kinds of writing and research, without being unnecessarily snide about others' work'. (Twitter reply against the original sexist post)

A recent special issue on online sexism and misogyny (Ging and Siapera, 2018) signalled the rising digital affordances of anti-feminist attacks, identified through a variety of terms, including gendered cyberhate, online abuse, online misogyny, digital violence, cyberbullying and cyberharassment, among others. These often have dire mental and physical effects for their targets, such as stomach-ache and depression, negative affectivity, augmented stress and concentration problems, lowered self-confidence, generalized distrust towards others, life-safety concerns, emotional labour exhaustion, troubled interpersonal relationships and fears of financial and career insecurity (Cassidy et al., 2017; Ferber, 2017).

More often than not, victims are inclined to self-censorship and silence, rather than to stand up against such aggressions, especially when there are structural elements that 'make it costly for women to speak' (Ahmed, 2016: 34), like in academia. Such was also our first reflex: to remain silent. But, we were reminded by Lorde (2017) that no matter the costs of speaking up, the costs of not speaking up will always be higher. We were also fortunate to be at the receiving end of feminist solidarity from part of the academic community, which empowered us to speak out. Inspired by related accounts (Cassidy et al., 2014, 2017; Lee, 2018; Lloro-Bidart, 2018; McKay et al., 2008), we read our recent experience – unfortunately neither isolated nor rare – in the context of feminist perspectives on impurity and abjection (Cixous, 1993; Kristeva, 1982; Pullen and Rhodes, 2008). Doing so, we seek to dismantle the language of academic sexist cyberbullying making an urgent call to overrule the abjection that this subjects us to.

By naming sexism, we seek to give substance to events that would otherwise remain dispersed experiences gone unnoticed, since some people are invested in not recognizing forms of sexist

aggression, thereby raising structural barriers that block and marginalize different *other* bodies (of knowledge) (Ahmed, 2016). We remember that if we are here today, granted this textual space, in an otherwise patriarchal academic culture, it is because others before us, including colleagues from the critical management studies community, have dared to speak against various instances of discrimination, including in academia (Ahmed, 2016; Dar et al., 2020; Lorde, 2017; Mir and Zanoni, 2020; Pullen, 2018; Rhodes et al., 2018; Tienari and Taylor, 2019). We thus take over the power to dismantle tweet by tweet, word by word, the often-veiled abjectifying language of academic cybersexism, calling for the necessity to challenge such aggressions *again and again*, despite complicit efforts to cover these up.

Overruling sexist abjectification, we suggest, is urgent; particularly in light of far-right, racist and sexist patriarchal ideologies pervading many aspects of political life (Davidson, 2021), and academic freedom (Myklebust, 2020). These increasingly target critical, feminist researchers studying ‘difference’ unwanted by the elite (e.g. women’s studies, gender studies, migration studies, de-colonial and post-colonial studies), often threatening professors or even whole departments with shutdowns and redundancies (Ferber, 2017; Komlik, 2021; Moodie, 2021). In this context, we present our example as part of a broader ideological attack addressed against those seen as not abiding by normative patriarchal structures advocating the supremacy of linear, disembodied and affectively disengaged knowledge. Empowered by the feminist solidarity we received after the attack, we propose collective embodied action, also at the institutional level, as a meaningful way to act up against academic sexist cyberbullying, joining Aumais in arguing that:

‘We are responsible for exposing and dismantling systems of inequality. Let’s start by looking at our own academic set of rules and behaviours and how they contribute to (re)produce patriarchal culture where male voices, words, behaviour, work and desires continue to be the norm and different voices continue to be silenced, (self)censored and disciplined. . . because we’re part of the problem. . ./Time’s up. (Aumais et al., 2018)’.

Time to dismantle the mechanisms of academic cybersexism

Critical organizational scholars have established the necessity to fight sexist aggressions emerging from deeply engrained heteronormative and masculine ideologies in academia (e.g. Aumais et al., 2018; Bell and King, 2010; Fotaki and Harding, 2013; Pullen, 2018; Vachhani and Pullen, 2019; Van Amsterdam, 2020). However, public expressions of hate, sexism, shaming, bullying, threats, mockery and insults intended to install and perpetuate a culture of fear and domination (e.g. Cassidy et al., 2014; Cowie et al., 2013; Davidson, 2021; Faucher et al., 2014; Waldron, 2012) continue to thrive, both online and offline. These often emerge from power asymmetries relating to tenure, status, gender, age, race, sexuality and other identifiers of difference. At the receiving end often stand women academics, namely early career ones (Lampman, 2012), who, as targets of such attacks, become enmeshed into a labyrinth, whereby the personal becomes political and the political becomes deeply personal (Hanisch, 1970; Lloro-Bidart, 2018). Under hate speech attempts (Waldron, 2012), sexist cyberbullying rejects different beliefs and ideologies (Benko, 2017; Davidson, 2021), using singular instances to disqualify a whole group of *different* others that dare to do things *differently* (Lloro-Bidart, 2018), supposedly in the name of “science”. Yet, many, either naively or more often cynically, do not even recognize the problem:

‘Where is the misogyny or sexism here? Are women immune from criticism?’ (response in support of the original attack)

To which a colleague reacted:

'When men who are professors select papers not in their field of expertise to mimic from women who are not professors - this is not critique'.

When we name something as sexist, 'we are often dismissed as having a faulty perception . . . "I didn't mean anything by it," he might say' (Ahmed, 2016: 35). This puts us in a position whereby we also have to educate our aggressors (Lorde, 2017), who are invested in a blindness that perpetuates and normalizes such forms of aggression, thereby 'sham[ing] bystanders into apathy' (Cowie and Myers, 2016: 3–14) and mantling the scars of our academic 'naked' bodies (Mandalaki and Pérezts, 2020). Such effects diffuse rapidly and uncontrollably in the (im)material cyberspace, over-exposing marginalized populations usually targeted by such attacks (Daniels and Stein, 2017). Such over-exposure is even stronger when targeted individuals/groups are not active on social media, and thus unaware of the cyberattacks unleashed against them, let alone in a position to defend themselves (Cassidy et al., 2017).

It is probably not a coincidence that since the rise, in our field, of critical perspectives and feminist studies problematizing taken for granted assumptions around hetero-male normative ways of socializing (e.g. Ortlieb and Sieben, 2019), learning, researching, writing and creating knowledge, that cybersexist attacks have increased (Ferber, 2017; Lloro-Bidart, 2018). In masculine academic cultures, those perceived as 'lacking' against the patriarchal norm (Lund and Tienari, 2019; Mandalaki, 2021) are frequently punished, rendered invisible, redundant, silenced and marginalized (Abdellatif, 2021; Bourabain, 2021) when/if they dare to speak up. *We become the problem for naming a problem* (Ahmed, 2016; Aumais et al., 2018) and thus are attacked with all sorts of sexist behaviour that trivializes and disqualifies our work, and thus our embodied existence as sites of knowledge.

In our case, behind the attack to us, as authors, there was also an attack to the journal *Organization*, for performing their commitment to publish unconventional research both in content and form to make 'an implicit claim about what problems matter' (Parker and Thomas, 2011: 425). Much like the glass ceiling and glass walls in gendered organizations, we see an invisible sexist (cyber)wall erecting structural barriers against those viewed as destabilizing patriarchal definitions of 'clean' academic knowledge (Ahmed, 2016; Daniels and Stein, 2017; Schmidt, 2017). It is precisely such suffocating structural barriers that our paper and the others attacked on the same occasion (Lund and Tienari, 2019; Mandalaki and Pérezts, 2020; Pullen, 2018; Slutskaya and De Cock, 2008) wrote against. Dismantling such barriers seems to be a shared need:

'Papers like the one you trashed here are a breath of fresh air for so many of us'. (Supportive Twitter reply)

So, while many do not 'see the problem' accusing us of making a fuss about *nothing*, it becomes of dire importance to understand and expose its (often-veiled) language and mechanisms of disqualifying different bodies' potential of/for knowing. We propose to do so below by discussing our experience in the light of feminist perspectives on impurity and abjection.

Naming cyberabjection in academia

'Apparently an Editor and three reviewers found this stuff sufficiently interesting to warrant publication' (part of the original attack)

I remember the feeling of giving birth every time I was pressing the re-submission button. And he is also ridiculing others' work. I don't know how to feel; it's one of those wordless moments.

That was sadly precisely the point. Silencing us, instead of allowing our words to flow. Is our work bullshit then? Are all humanities bullshit too? What a 'cheap shot' indeed.

Is 'this stuff', referring to all the embodied labour, pleasure, pain, physically and intellectually uncomfortable, but also engaging moments that we shared while co-writing the article that was attacked? How can these people reduce all this labour to 'this stuff' also trivializing the work of its editors and reviewers? In the thread of ensuing comments, we were labelled as 'bullshiters', while *Organization* was accused of having 'zero scientific value', and the business schools that employ us were taxed with being 'havens for failed sociologists, anthropologists, etc'.¹ Suspicious and 'dirty' words in the titles of the attacked articles were enough to mockingly discredit the work behind them (we doubt that even the abstracts were actually read).

Disagreement can be productive and we welcome it. But in cybersexism and cyberbullying, there is no intention to engage in a conversation, or even in a *disputatio*. There is merely the intention of conducting a blunt and (un)disguised attack on any form of difference, only considered sufficient, interesting or worthy of consideration and visibility when it serves patriarchy's 'sanitizing' interests.

We suggest analysing this as a process of abjection, against which we should act up. In her theorization of abjection, Kristeva (1982) explains how patriarchy's essentialist constructions of the female body (particularly as connected to maternity) are used to abjectify women. Abjection is the intermediary, ambiguous 'state of being cast out', between a subject and an object, which, based on Kristeva, through cultural markings of what we think of as unclean disqualifies different bodies' potential for knowledge. Elizabeth Grosz further notes that abjection involves the 'impossible desire to transcend corporeality . . . a refusal of the defiling, impure, uncontrollable materiality of a subject's embodied existence' (1989: 72; 1994), which patriarchy uses to attack anything leaky and embodied, perceiving it as dangerous. Cixous (1993) also explains how normative masculine ideologies exclude anything impure, dirty bodies, their erotic impulse and writing, from normative thinking and writing traditions.

In a remarkable piece that could stand proudly with the others accused, Pullen and Rhodes (2008: 251) draw on Kristeva to argue that 'at the level of organizational cleansing, (abjection) is the casting out of dirt, and the casting out of the feminine', which patriarchy works against. The imperative of abjection is 'CLEANSE YOURSELF OR BE SHAMED' in social life and the academic text (2008: 255, original capitalization). In this reading, much 'like dirt, germs [and/or] bodily excrement', embodied texts exposing the leaky body's knowledge potentials are perceived to 'threaten the purity and order of organization' (Pullen and Rhodes, 2008: 251).

In the piece that was attacked, we precisely argued for the importance of exposing our vulnerabilities and embodied leaks by standing 'naked but not ashamed' in our academic writing. We did so by emphasizing the transformational power of *eroticizing* instead of *sexualizing* academic nakedness (Aumais et al., 2018; Bell and Sinclair, 2014), to counter traditional associations of nakedness with obscenity and dirt in knowledge creation and writing (Mandalaki and Pérezts, 2020). And, unsurprisingly, we were attacked! 'Watch what happens. Ouch', our bodies become 'those little objects hurled against [cyber] walls', under patriarchal domination (Ahmed, 2016: 138). For all the plurality of knowledge that our account advocates; for all the difference and marginalization that we speak of and strive to include in academia through notions of care and relationality, our bodies and our work are brought to the cyber battleground, attacked, ridiculed as abject, insufficient and incomplete (Cixous, 1993; Kristeva, 1982).

By using abjectifying language cyberbullies seek to reinforce power asymmetries and unleash ideological attacks against forms of feminist knowledge presenting epistemological revolutions to conventional ways of knowing (Bell et al., 2019; Lloro-Bidart, 2018). They think they own ‘the rules of the academic game’ seeking to exclude the sensing, affective body’s knowledge potential, and in particular bodies deviating from the cisgender (male) norm (Fotaki et al., 2014; Grosz, 1995; Mandalaki, 2021; Pérezts, forthcoming; Phillips et al., 2014; Pullen, 2018; Pullen et al., 2020; Young, 1980). This contributes to sustaining an academic status quo, whereby feminine and feminist ideas and knowledge are either wholly rejected as subjective, dangerous, radical identity politics threatening established epistemological orders or marginally expressed in academic spaces constructed as prestigious (Bell et al., 2019).

Yet, as Pullen and Rhodes write, abjection is experienced in the body, opening it up ‘as both the locus and authority of writing’ (2008: 251) to reclaim its dirt and fluids as sources of autonomy and self-identity (Grosz, 1994) and stand against the disempowerment that bullies seek to bestow upon their targets. Spilling these leaks out on to the page destabilizes the dominant order (Pullen and Rhodes, 2008), attesting to the ‘impossibility of the “clean” and “proper”’ (Grosz, 1995: 193). This converts our writing into an act of resistance (Ahonen et al., 2020) and ourselves from casualties to warriors (Lorde, 2017) empowering us to challenge what one of the reviewers of this piece thoughtfully described as ‘illegitimate rearguard actions’. These are performed by those, who, despite being from outside our research sub-field, feel entitled to judge the scientific value of our work as irrelevant, ‘failed’ and impure when compared to their own work so desperately trying to emulate the ‘hard’ ‘science of erection’ (Höpfl, 2000: 104).

Unsurprisingly, our recent experience also confirms literature identifying academic bullies as usually being established (male) professors. Through (often-anonymous, but increasingly explicit) cyber profiles as well as ‘manipulation, and exploitation of well-connected relationships . . . , [they] manage to escape the consequences for their behaviour’, protect their identities, and even remain blind to their wrong-doing (Cassidy et al., 2017: 15), as illustrated by the supportive comments below:

- *This is not the first time he mocks research he does not understand. In fact it seems to be a habit*
- *It’s a combination of hubris arrogance and ignorance, mixed with sexism – here you go, the cocktail of misogynistic attacks to gender or radical qualitative scholarship. . .*
- *He complained about having them taken down in a *new* misogynistic post he made suggesting that gender/sexuality publications are simply word salad hoaxes.*
- *Narcissists patrolling the ‘standards’ of management studies. This public devaluing of radically different ways and approaches to understand human experience of studying others is a marker of the worst kind of male self-entitlement in academia*
- *He won’t ston and won’t change. But we continue to rise, so keep writing – and stop reading his posts. 😊*

However, if the cyberspace over-exposes the marginalized and their knowledge to sexist behaviour, it can also provide opportunities for reinventing ways of conducting activist work and solidarity (Aumais et al., 2018; Baer, 2016; Vachhani and Pullen, 2019), communicating, working and relating, particularly in pandemic ‘disembodied’ times (Cozza et al., 2021; Mandalaki and Daou, 2021). We next discuss this in three steps (Cixous, 1993).

Three steps in the ladder of Acting up

Countering cyberbullying with cybersolidarity: Join the chorus!

'We are livid about this LinkedIn post, which openly mocks our colleagues' work on intercorporeality published in Organization. It along with the associated comments are heinous forms of sexist bullying. Enough! Flagging it here for your consideration and collective support'.

'So sorry and angry! Solidarity. This is an attack towards academic freedom, critical work, the entire "writing differently" tradition, feminist work and work on embodiment'.

Soon after this sexist event, we began receiving a large number of private and public supportive messages both from colleagues we knew and other members of the international academic business community whom we have never met, asking 'Are you ok?' Worried about our wellbeing, they voiced their disgust for the attack and their support to us.

'The type of myopic, narrow and unimaginative research people do in mainstream management and neoliberal business schools which seems to be championed in this thread is EXACTLY why we need papers like this'.

'(Your paper) stood out to me and I still remember enjoying reading it. X will probably never appreciate this type of research, but you should know that we are many others who do!'

'My solidarity for you (. . .) I hope you can both feel safe to continue writing wonderful pieces'.

'I am so sorry you are experiencing this. The mendacious audacity of these people is staggering (. . .) This is part of a broader attack-we must remain vigilant and must support each other'.

Several academics, internationally, also flagged the dire inappropriateness of the situation by alerting us, as authors, but also the social media platforms themselves, various academic groups and institutions, including the journal. Notably, following these reports, LinkedIn took the posts down, while some members of the critical academic community responded to the perpetrators directly. Before the two of us had even realized fully what was happening, neither particularly active on social media, we were already carried in the arms of an invisible, yet not less real, community. Such caring response was deeply meaningful for our personal well-being but also as a confirmation that we should continue, through our commitment to feminist scholarship, advocating inclusion of difference and plurality of perspectives in academic knowledge, to visibilize all the dirty and 'naked' elements that patriarchy maintains veiled, hidden and marginalized (Mandalaki and Pérezts, 2020; Pullen and Rhodes, 2008).

Despite its materially disembodied nature, we experienced the expressed cybersolidarity as a politicized ethics of care (Fotaki et al., 2020; Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020; Vachhani and Pullen, 2019), which as established in feminist literature, can only be enabled when different bodies engage in relational action to resist normative exclusionary orders (Butler, 2015). Empowered by this, we assert that we need to support each other and keep acting up through feminism understood, embodied and practiced as a solidary movement against academic sexism and all forms of attacks against difference (Hooks, 2000). Because although it sometimes feels as if we are left alone or shouting in the void, we might be actually joining a chorus (Lorde, 2017). A recent activist performance created a temporary 'internet violence museum' (Davidson, 2021) by printing hundreds of messages of online abuse, sexist trolling and cyberbullying on large banners, which they exposed on an unidentified hill in China. This reminds us that sexism is a global phenomenon beyond

academia, calling for a global fight. We are convinced that even if we can't hear the chorus or think that it doesn't exist, we should start singing and dancing to (re)create it, to generate the energy for transforming our silence into voice and action (Lorde, 2017).

Unsilencing our bodies, through this text, is both cathartic and political, whereby we share our experiences as targets of sexist behaviour to make ourselves part of a broader political cause that is shared (Van Amsterdam, 2020). Only by making sexist aggressions audible and visible, can we take meaningful action against their normalization, and against those who perceive our feminist voices as 'failed subjectivities' and try to punish us for it (Ahmed, 2016: 66).

Acting ethically and relationally

Our initial reluctance to reply, at all, is certainly linked to the consequences of being over-exposed within the academic community but also in terms of all the emotional, psychological, physical and other adverse effects of sexist behaviour (Chan and Brough, 2021; Ferber, 2017). This initial reluctance can also be explained by certain ethical considerations in relation to reproducing original tweets or comments and how their authors are (re)presented (DeLorme et al., 2001; Palfrey, 2010). While not mentioning the real or pseudo identities involved, we acknowledge that we have a responsibility towards the authors behind them, as part of our broad audience (Lee, 2018), and are aware that, in some cases, these are potentially identifiable (British Psychological Society, 2013; Whiting and Pritchard, 2017).

We distinguish two categories. Firstly, when asking those who supported us, if we could reproduce their comments here, we were particularly touched by a second, unanimous wave of support: maybe the most relational and solidary ethical informed consent we have ever received in our research experiences, to date. Secondly, in the case of the original attack posts, we have chosen to reproduce them without asking for specific consent, since these were not created in the context of private discussions to which we participated (Langer and Beckman, 2005; Richards, 2012; Roberts, 2015). Instead, they were performed publicly on social media and made available to a wider public, including us, who are not even account-holders on some of these spaces. As such, by reproducing them here, we do not disclose anything that was not already in full public view, but we assert and denounce their unethical and unprofessional character. While not explicitly naming their authors, we consider it is our ethical responsibility to make visible their sexist cyberbullying, and not let this go unnoticed and un denounced, in this academic piece, even without informed consent (Lee, 2018). Writing this text and using information that might make people identifiable is not about unleashing personal attacks against our perpetrators, whom we do not even know personally. It is about responding *academically* by engaging into a formal academic debate, and not in the shifty space of social media, to defend the right of a whole community of scholars who dare to think, write and do things differently to be able to continue doing so.

The collective support we received gave us hope and convinced us, as also Lorde (2017) reminds us, that *our silence will not protect us*, despite the costs that unsilencing also usually involves. Particularly, 'when ethics determine that the perpetrator must be protected, the power remains with the perpetrator and the victim continues to be silenced' (Lee, 2018: 312). As ethically responsible subjects, we thus write to (re)claim our right to expose our story, as part of an emancipatory and empowering overruling of objectification. Denying this would in itself be an act of oppression. And if we decided to write this piece, in this way, it is also because our silence will not protect any *other*, who could be at the receiving end of such aggressions. Engaging in such ethical reflexivity, and even a forward looking one encouraged in digital research (Pritchard and Whiting, 2012), is part of our ethical commitment to act up against instances of sexist cyberbullying and any form of unethical, objectifying behaviour, that speaks from a power position to

marginalize vulnerable others. Since often enough our institutions, who could have significant leverage, fail to protect us (Cassidy et al., 2017).

Academic research is not perfect and should never be in order to remain refutable and debatable. This does not mean having to ask for *author-ization* by submitting to ‘superior’, ‘legitimate’ forces or apologizing for our embodied writing but rather use our authorial voices to challenge abjectifying tendencies that constrain our ability to speak in academia (Mandalaki, 2021). Our work is meant to be discussed *with* others, not abjectified as *Other*. We stand up for this journal and with the community of passionate scholars who dare to ask unsettling questions, who ‘see some emancipatory potential in the work they do’ (Prichard and Benschop, 2018: 99) and engage with ‘the sort of reflection that doesn’t sit easily within the core of disciplines and institutions’ (Parker and Thomas, 2011: 425). It is within such embodied collective spaces of freedom and solidarity that the root of empowerment can be found. There, we acknowledge, that ‘knowledge has a politics’ (Parker and Thomas, 2011: 421), which cannot be separate from the body of the knower, as one of the reviewers of this piece so poignantly put it. With each embodied word, we ‘make activism a feature of academic work’ (Prichard and Benschop, 2018: 98; Contu, 2020; Rhodes et al., 2018), to reclaim our right to inhabit our embodied spaces and their truths in our scholarship (Dar et al., 2020), thereby keeping the flame of critical and feminist scholarship alive.

Extending an invitation (again and again)

We ended our accused piece with an open invitation (Mandalaki and Pérezts, 2020), embodying our conception of thinking and writing relationally (about) organizations. Some chose to waive away with contempt on social media, while others took it and engaged with us in further conversations. Feminist scholars have already been acting up and will continue to do so. We therefore end this piece by calling to action the broader academic community, to reassert our collective responsibility to work with(in) our institutions to foster a collaborative, collegial, respectful environment, where ideas can be debated and flourish, instead of a climate of hate, intolerance and sexism, both online and offline. Institutional authorities’ (non)response can ‘make a huge difference both in positive and negative terms’ (Cassidy et al., 2017: 12) and even lead to feelings of institutional betrayal, whether it actively silences peripheral voices or fails to protect them when threatened (Smith and Freyd, 2014).

Academic cyberbullying proliferating nowadays, unlike academic debates appearing in academic journals, does not engage in dialogical, reviewing processes before publication thus risking to reinforce bias and misinterpretation around the attacked work, when not carefully monitored. It is the responsibility of institutions, ours and those of the perpetrators in this context, to be prepared to tackle these instances before they diffuse to avoid upholding toxic cultures, whereby such behaviours go unnoticed and unpunished (Aumais et al., 2018; Lloro-Bidart, 2018). From academic leaders, supervisors, academic committees, colleagues and bystanders, including ourselves, but mainly those who make the ‘important’ decisions shaping institutional structures and cultures, like department chairs and deans, we should all engage in making sexist cyberbullying visible and act against it. This could be done through the introduction of sexism-related preventive institutional policies, closer monitoring of academic institutions’ and their members’ professional social medial presence, to ensure that sexist dismissal of ‘dangerous’ and disruptive academic work (Bell et al., 2019) is banned and taken down, and its authors held accountable to their institutions and to the broader scholarly community. Moreover, institutions should provide organized and systematic support for targeted individuals/groups and encourage them to speak up, as well as develop ways to retaliate against perpetrators, regardless of their status, tenure or other identifiers of power (Cassidy et al., 2017). Our schools should also work towards broadening the epistemic grounds,

which determine whether our ability to research, speak and write *differently* can find roots to grow or collapse. This is necessary, we argue, for enabling research cultures, which welcome different ways of knowing and embrace this kind of openness towards academic freedom, which our work, as writers of organizations, should congratulate.

‘Feminist work is here to stay’, as a reviewer justly put it, and we shan’t apologize about it, we add. We shall keep acting against insidious abjectifying language, both online and offline, in order to keep problematizing c/overt sexist attacks and prevent them from being normalized. We shall keep reclaiming writing (from/about) the dirty, leaky body as an emancipating practice that advances dialogue, conversation and inclusion of difference to preserve the right of marginalized others to expose their bodies as sites of knowing.

‘Maybe we should take tango lessons’ (Twitter attack²)

You’re absolutely right, man. You definitely should.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iDs

Emmanouela Mandalaki  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9228-3516>

Mar Pérezts  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1185-9876>

Notes

1. Disappointing to our attackers as this may be, we are neither anthropologists nor sociologists but have colleagues who are, and whose contributions meaningfully participate in the plurality of knowledge, which we wish our academic work to advocate for. Moreover, our PhDs, from reputed business schools, have never prevented us from drawing on the humanities and social sciences, which are an integral part of management and organization studies since their inception (e.g. Johnsen et al., 2021).
2. Ridiculing the fact that our paper drew on tango dancing as a metaphor.

References

- Abdellatif, A. (2021) ‘Marginalized to Double Marginalized: My Mutational Intersectionality Between the East and the West’, *Gender Work and Organization* 28: 58–65.
- Ahmed, S. (2016) *Living a Feminist Life*. Duke University Press.
- Ahonen, P., Blomberg, A., Doerr, K., et al. (2020) ‘Writing Resistance Together’, *Gender Work and Organization* 27(4): 447–70.
- Aumais, N., Basque, J., Carrim, N. M., et al. (2018) ‘In 1000 Words: #TimeIsUp, Academics and Organization Studies’, *Management* 21(3): 1080–1117.
- Baer, H. (2016) ‘Redoing Feminism: Digital Activism, Body Politics, and Neoliberalism’, *Feminist Media Studies* 16(1): 17–34.
- Bell, E. and King, D. (2010) ‘The Elephant in the Room: Critical Management Studies Conferences as a Site of Body Pedagogics’, *Management Learning* 41(4): 429–42.
- Bell, E., Meriläinen, S., Taylor, S., et al. (2019) ‘Time’s Up! Feminist Theory and Activism Meets Organization Studies’, *Human Relations* 72(1): 4–22.
- Bell, E. and Sinclair, A. (2014) ‘Reclaiming Eroticism in the Academy’, *Organization* 21(2): 268–280.
- Benko, R. (2017) The Political is Now Personal. The Huffington Post, Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/living-room-conversations/the-political-is-now-pers_b_14662924.html.

- Bourabain, D. (2021) 'Everyday Sexism and Racism in the Ivory Tower: The Experiences of Early Career Researchers on the Intersection of Gender and Ethnicity in the Academic Workplace', *Gender Work and Organization* 28(1): 248–67.
- British Psychological Society. (2013) *Ethics Guidelines for Internet-Mediated Research*, (Vol. INF206/1.2013). Leicester: British Psychological Society.
- Butler, J. (2015) *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cassidy, W., Faucher, C. and Jackson, M. (2014) 'The Dark Side of the Ivory Tower: Cyberbullying of University Faculty and Teaching Personnel', *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 60(2): 279–99.
- Cassidy, W., Faucher, C. and Jackson, M. (2017) 'Adversity in University: Cyberbullying and Its Impacts on Students, Faculty and Administrators', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 14(8): 888.
- Chan, X. W. and Brough, P. (2021) *Depression, Burnout, Insomnia, Headaches: How a Toxic and Sexist Workplace Culture Can Affect Your Health*. The Conversation. Retrieved April 13, 2020 from <https://theconversation.com/depression-burnout-insomnia-headaches-how-a-toxic-and-sexist-workplace-culture-can-affect-your-health-158062>
- Cixous, H. (1993) *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Contu, A. (2020) 'Answering the Crisis With Intellectual Activism: Making a Difference as Business Schools Scholars', *Human Relations* 73(5): 737–57.
- Cowie, H., Bauman, S., Coyne, I., et al. (2013) 'Cyberbullying Amongst University Students: An Emergent Cause for Concern?', in P. K. Smith and G. Steffgen (eds) *Cyberbullying Through the New Media: Findings From an International Network*. London: Psychology Press.
- Cowie, H. and Myers, C. A. (2016) 'What We Know to Date About Bullying and Cyberbullying Among University Students', in H. Cowie and C. A. Myers (eds) *Bullying Among University Students: Cross-National Perspectives*, pp. 157–171. London: Routledge.
- Cozza, M., Gherardi, S., Graziano, V., et al. (2021) 'COVID-19 as a Breakdown in the Texture of Social Practices', *Gender Work and Organization* 28(S1): 190–208.
- Daniels, J. and Stein, A. (2017) Protect Scholars Against Attacks From the Right. Inside Higher Education. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2017/06/26/why-institutions-should-shield-academics-who-are-being-attacked-conservative-groups?utm_contentDbuffer65c70&utm_mediumDsocial&utm_sourceDtwitter&utm_campaignDIHEbuffer.
- Dar, S., Liu, H., Martinez Dy, A., et al. (2020) The Business School is Racist: Act Up!. Organization, 1350508420928521.
- Davidson, H. (2021) China's Feminists Protest Against Wave of Online Abuse With 'Internet Violence Museum', the Guardian, Retrived From https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/13/chinas-feminists-protest-against-wave-of-online-abuse-with-internet-violence-museum?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other&fbclid=IwAR0uvCIng0CyId-AbWDIie4RRtGuw5ld_tujCnzZ95XXZWs8cKq_Jast5Gg on May 28th, 2021.
- DeLorme, D. E., Sinkhan, G. M. and French, W. (2001) 'Ethics and the Internet Issues Associated with Qualitative Research', *Journal of Business Ethics* 33(4): 271–286.
- Faucher, C., Jackson, M. and Cassidy, W. (2014) 'Cyberbullying Among University Students: Gendered Experiences, Impacts, and Perspectives', *Education Research International* 2014: 1–10.
- Ferber, A. (2017) 'Faculty Under Attack', *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 1(39): 37–42.
- Fotaki, M. and Harding, N. (2013) 'Lacan and Sexual Difference in Organization and Management Theory: Towards a Hysterical Academy?', *Organization* 20(2): 153–72.
- Fotaki, M., Islam, G. and Antoni, A. (eds) (2020) *Business Ethics and Care in Organizations*. London: Routledge.
- Fotaki, M., Metcalfe, B. D. and Harding, N. (2014) 'Writing Materiality Into Management and Organization Studies Through and With Luce Irigaray', *Human Relations* 67(10): 1239–63.
- Ging, D. and Siapera, E. (2018) 'Special Issue on Online Misogyny', *Feminist Media Studies* 18(4): 515–24.
- Grosz, E. (1994) *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin.
- Grosz, E. (1995) *Space, Time & Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. London/NY: Routledge.

- Hanisch, C. (1970) 'The Personal is Political', in S. Firestone and A. Koedt (eds) *Notes From the Second Year. Women's Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists*, pp. 76–8. NY: Radical Feminism.
- Hooks, B. (2000) *All About Love: New Visions*. NY: Harper Perennial.
- Höpfel, H. (2000) 'The Suffering Mother and the Miserable Son, Organizing Women and Organizing Women's Writing', *Gender Work and Organization* 7(2): 98–105.
- Johnsen, R., Skoglund, A., Statler, M., et al. (2021) 'Management Learning and the Unsettled Humanities: Introduction to the Special Issue', *Management Learning* 52(2): 135–43.
- Komlik, O. (2021) *Condemning the University of Leicester — Standing for Political Economy and Critical Management Studies*. Economic Sociology and Political Economy.
- Kristeva, J. (1982) *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. NY: Columbia University, trans. L. Roudiez.
- Lampman, C. (2012) 'Women Faculty at Risk: U.S. Professors Report on Their Experiences With Student Incivility, Bullying, Aggression, and Sexual Attention', *NASPA Journal About Women In Higher Education* 5: 184–208.
- Langer, R. and Beckman, S. C. (2005) 'Sensitive Research Topics: Netnography Revisited', *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* 8(2): 189–203.
- Lee, C. (2018) 'Culture, Consent and Confidentiality in Workplace Autoethnography', *Journal of Organizational Ethnography* 7(3): 302–19.
- Lloro-Bidart, T. (2018) 'An Ecofeminist Account of Cyberbullying: Implications for Environmental and Social Justice Scholar-Educator-Activists', *The Journal of Environmental Education* 49(4): 276–85.
- Lorde, A. (2017) *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*. London: Silver Press.
- Lund, R. and Tienari, J. (2019) 'Passion, Care, and Eros in the Gendered Neoliberal University', *Organization* 26(1): 98–121.
- Mandalaki, E. (2021) 'Author-ize me to Write: Going Back to Writing with our Fingers', *Gender, Work & Organization* 28(3): 1008–1022.
- Mandalaki, E. and Daou, E. (2021) '(Dis) embodied Encounters between Art and Academic Writing Amid a Pandemic', *Gender, Work & Organization* 28(S1): 227–242.
- Mandalaki, E. and Fotaki, M. (2020) 'The Bodies of the Commons: Towards a Relational Embodied Ethics of the Commons', *Journal of Business Ethics* 166(4): 745–760.
- Mandalaki, E. and Pérezts, M. (2020) 'It Takes two to Tango: Theorizing Inter-corporeality through Nakedness and Eros in Researching and Writing Organizations', *Organization*. Epub ahead of print 17 September 2020. DOI: 10.1177/1350508420956321.
- McKay, R., Arnold, D. H., Fratzi, J., et al. (2008) 'Workplace Bullying in Academia: A Canadian Study', *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* 20(2): 77–100.
- Mir, R. and Zaroni, P. (2020) *Black Lives Matter: Organization Recommits to Racial Justice*. Organization, 1350508420966740.
- Moodie, J. (2021) *Growing Anger, Bitterness Over Laurentian Cuts*. Sudbury Star. Retrieved April 14, 2021 from <https://www.thesudburystar.com/news/local-news/growing-anger-bitterness-over-laurentian-cuts>
- Myklebust, J. P. (2020) *Legislation on Academic Freedom to Be Strengthened*, accessed June 22, 2021 on <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20201107080157547>.
- Ortlieb, R. and Sieben, B. (2019) 'Balls, Barbecues and Boxing: Contesting Gender Regimes at Organizational Social Events', *Organization Studies* 40(1): 115–34.
- Palfrey, J. (2010) 'Four Phases of Internet Regulation', *Social Research* 77(3): 981–996.
- Parker, M. and Thomas, R. (2011) 'What is a Critical Journal?', *Organization* 18(4): 419–27.
- Pérezts, M. (forthcoming) 'Je est un homme. Réflexions sur le français, l'indécible femme et la quête d'une écriture nue', in N. Aumais and L. Dorion (eds) *Féminisme et Management: enjeux et état de l'art des travaux francophones*. Presses Universitaires de Laval.
- Phillips, M., Pullen, A. and Rhodes, C. (2014) 'Writing Organization as Gendered Practice: Interrupting the Libidinal Economy', *Organization Studies* 35(3): 313–33.
- Prichard, C. and Benschop, Y. (2018) 'It's Time for Acting Up!', *Organization* 25(1): 98–105.
- Pritchard, K. and Whiting, R. (2012) 'Autopilot? A Reflexive Review of the Piloting Process in Qualitative E-research', *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management* 7(3): 338–353.
- Pullen, A. (2018) 'Writing as Labiaplasty', *Organization* 25(1): 123–30.

- Pullen, A., Helin, J. and Harding, N. (2020) *Writing Differently*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing.
- Pullen, A. and Rhodes, C. (2008) 'Dirty Writing', *Culture and Organization* 14(3): 241–59.
- Rhodes, C., Wright, C. and Pullen, A. (2018) 'Changing the World? The Politics of Activism and Impact in the Neoliberal University', *Organization* 25(1): 139–47.
- Richards, J. (2012) 'What has the Internet Ever Done for Employees? A Review, Map and Research Agenda', *Employee Relations* 34(1): 22–43.
- Roberts, L. D. (2015) 'Ethical Issues in Conducting Qualitative Research in Online Communities', *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 12(3): 314–325.
- Schmidt, P. (2017) Professors' Growing Risk: Harassment for Things They Never Really Said. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved from http://www.chronicle.com/article/Professors-Growing-Risk-/240424?cidDat&utm_sourceDat&utm_mediumDen&elqTrackIdD7c686c458dc7401ea6ba45dcdfdce019&elqD5911339a65354577b5ff813d67715375&elqaidD14505&elqatD1&elqCampaignIdD6106.
- Slutskey, N. and De Cock, C. (2008) 'The Body Dances: Carnival Dance and Organization', *Organization* 15(6): 851–868.
- Smith, C. P. and Freyd, J. J. (2014) 'Institutional Betrayal', *American Psychologist* 69(6): 575–87.
- Tienari, J. and Taylor, S. (2019) 'Feminism and Men: Ambivalent Space for Acting Up', *Organization* 26(6): 948–60.
- Vachhani, S. J. and Pullen, A. (2019) 'Ethics, Politics and Feminist Organizing: Writing Feminist Infrapolitics and Affective Solidarity Into Everyday Sexism', *Human Relations* 72(1): 23–47.
- Van Amsterdam, N. (2020) 'On Silence and Speaking Out About Sexual Violence: An Exploration Through Poetry', in A. Pullen, J. Helin and N. Harding (eds) *Writing Differently. Dialogues in Critical Management Studies*, Vol. 4. Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Waldron, J. (2012) *The Harm in Hate Speech*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Whiting, R. and Pritchard, K. (2017) 'Digital Ethics', in C. Cassell, A. Cunliffe and G. Grandy (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods*. London: Sage.
- Young, I. M. (1980) 'Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality', *Human Studies* 3(1): 137–156.

Author biographies

Emmanouela Mandalaki is Assistant Professor of Organizations at NEOMA Business School. In her research, Emmanouela engages with (auto)ethnography heavily informed by her artistic practices, which she combines with feminist thinking and creative forms of writing to explore issues of embodiment, ethics, gender, diversity, and affect, in organizations.

Mar Pérezts is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and Organization at Emlyon Business School and OCE Research Centre. Her work is transversal, and delves into organizational questions through critical and philosophical approaches, with a strong focus on engaged writing. She serves as Book Reviews Editor for Organization Studies since 2017.