Intersectional reflexivity and relational intersectionality:
The perils, potential and politics of researching diversity in organizations

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Researcher reflexivity has been examined extensively in the management and organization studies literature, asking valuable questions about the role of the subjectivity and identity of researchers in the production of knowledge in the nexus of academic and organizational practices (Gilmore & Kenny, 2015). Eschewing objectivity and validity and scientist preoccupations that obscure the value-laden and political character of all scholarly inquiry, reflexivity has emerged as the hallmark of 'good' post-positivist research (Welch, 2018). Reflexivity has also come under criticism for being practised somewhat narcissistically, with researchers using reflexivity as a ruse to be able to shift attention to themselves ahead of a concern for the people and phenomena they are investigating (Rhodes, 2009).

While these debates have served to critically question the position of the researcher in the production of knowledge about organizations, with few exceptions (e.g. Acker, 2011, Holvino 2010; Rodriguez, 2018), how intersectionality connects to reflexivity in organization studies has been largely under-theorized. Even less attended to are the forms of 'relational intersectionality' (e.g. the intersectionality that emerges or is constructed between researchers and participants in the specific time and place of data collection and through the lifespan of research projects) (McEwen et al., 2019), and how these are not only central to what and how knowledge can be produced, but can have a manifest effect on the organizations and participants being researched. To address this, we explore empirically what Rodriguez (2018) calls 'intersectional reflexivity', understood as the ways in which intersectionality, the diverse identities of and relationships between participants and researchers can be central in shaping knowledge. We draw on qualitative research in two large organizations in Australia where we investigated intersectionality and leadership diversity.

Presenting ethnographic fieldnotes and post-fieldwork reflections, we explore the ethical and political struggles of researchers when participants talk of themselves, and the ways in which it influences us. In particular, the constraints faced in doing this research by asking how our involvement as researchers effects changes in the organizations, for better and/or for worse, is discussed. In so doing, we address the limitations and possibilities of advancing research when organizational change strikes, and when one's own research work is entangled in that change. We conclude by suggesting that relational intersectionality in organizational research can go beyond just having an influence on knowledge production to precipitating—albeit not necessarily deliberately—organizational change, and that intersectional reflexivity is critical in addressing the politics and potential perils of researching diversity in organizations.

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