# Fifty shades of outrage: women's collective online action, embodiment and emotions

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# Fifty shades of outrage: women's collective online action, embodiment and emotions

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Social media have become an important avenue through which citizens agitate and advocate for social change. The impetus for protest activity is usually the perception of injustice leading to public anger shared online and which may mobilise people to take further action (e.g. join a protest demonstration or sign a petition). Research on activism using social media is still nascent, and there are as yet no studies examining the gendered dimensions of social activism on the Internet vis-à-vis the world of work. This article discusses two recent social media incidents involving aspects of women's embodiment – menstruation and sexual attractiveness – in which action through social media arguably influenced organisations to change some aspect of their practice. Our analysis is grounded in feminist theories of embodiment to theorise the expression of anger in Internet social activism. The implications of this article include a deepened appreciation of the potential of social media for women's collective action and the need for more research into the role of social media in forwarding women's collective rights at work.

**Keywords:** social media; Internet activism; embodiment; emotions; anger

## Introduction

There is a growing recognition that social media is an important and growing avenue both for expressing conflicting feelings about working life (Richards 2008, 2012) and as a wider forum for collectively protesting about a range of social ills. Broad political and environmental movements have been using the Internet and social media in social action for many years (Shirky 2011), and this phenomenon is attracting research on social movements and the use of social media in political activism (Ganesh et al. 2005; Ganesh & Stohl 2013). Richards, in relation to the use of the Internet by employees says that more research is needed. He says:

> Critical researchers need to conduct more … qualitative case studies based on employee applications of new internet communication technologies, especially in relation to social networking platforms and hand-held devices with fast and efficient internet capabilities. (2012: 38)

Manuel Castells (2009/2013, 2012) is a key writer about the use of the Internet in social activism. He has written extensively about social movements in relation to the Internet and the realignment of organisational power that we are currently seeing with the adoption of communication technology accompanied by globalisation. His research continues a

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long-standing tradition of research seeking to understand social movements as sites of dissidence and change (e.g. Morris & Mueller 1992). Castells focuses on counter-hegemony and the horizontal communication networks enabled through social media because in these communication networks he sees an opening-up space for political action. The example of the recent Occupy movements, which spread around the globe, illustrates how horizontal networking is being used to mobilise people in protest action (Ganesh & Stohl 2013). Emotions are central to the way Castells frames his argument: he argues fear and anxiety are addressed by users through sharing and identification with others through these horizontal communication networks which can lead to risk-taking behaviour such as engaging in street protests. Protesters are protected to an extent from the negative ramifications of 'talking-back-to-power' by the anonymity of the Internet and the lack of a centre of coordination as networks work through multiple nodes. Castells has initiated important work in helping us to understand how social media is being used in social activism, but there is ongoing work to be done in understanding the new landscape/terrain of power and counter-power that the era of digitalisation is bringing.

In this article, we discuss how the counter-power capacities of social media are being adapted or co-opted to re-energise resistance and re-configure collective practices in employee relations. The existing literature on contemporary employee resistance paints a fairly bleak picture when it comes to collective action: unionism is in decline, and at the individual level 'employee misbehaviours' are silenced, trivialised or made marginal (Ackroyd & Thompson 1999/2012). Overt displays of righteous anger appear to have declined within organisations as unions have been side-lined although union theory is attempting to align with social movement theory to re-energise the movement (Gahan & Pekarek 2013). At the individual level, cynical distancing seems to be the new emotional norm (Fleming & Spicer 2003) and humour a way to deal with unwelcome management practices (e.g. Taylor & Bain 2003). In an environment where counter-hegemonic practices are marginalised and ostracised, where are the alternatives? Can social media have a role to play in contesting unitarist versions of managerial power?

Women are particularly vulnerable as a working population to the new ways of working that are accompanying modern managerial practices of casualisation and flexibilisation. For women, work continues to be largely defined and constrained by discourses around their bodies such as their 'looks' (in aesthetic labour) and their so-called natural capacity for emotional labour (in care work). Workplace issues of primary importance to women are still discrimination, equal pay and secure work. However, women are in an even more difficult position when contesting inequalities and injustices in the workplace, as they are often the most marginal employees in terms of their obvious positioning within the organisation (i.e. most likely to be casualised labour and lower on organisational hierarchies) and their less obvious situation of being 'marginalised bodies' (Acker 1990) or 'space invaders' (Puwar 2004). Yet, despite this marginalisation, women are vocal about injustice in social media. In New Zealand, for instance, there have been campaigns where social media have been mobilised to put pressure on organisations to rectify perceived injustices, specifically overt sexism, on work-related issues.

How can we begin to theorise and understand women's use of social media regarding work issues? In this article, we use post-structural feminist theories of embodiment, especially where they intersect with how we can conceive of an emotional, political 'collective' body of women engaged in activities related to counter-hegemonic practices. We discuss two recent incidents that illustrate push-back from women on issues related to their working bodies: pay equity and menstruation; and sexual attractiveness in marketing. This article discusses these two incidents in order to show how women have been using

social media to place pressure on organisations vis-à-vis overtly sexist utterances and practices around women's working bodies. We conclude by highlighting our main contribution, which is to draw attention to the significance of social media to women's collective action around working issues, and suggestions for further research that arise from our considerations.

## Theoretical framing: gender, embodiment and emotions

One feature of social media, as stressed by Castells, is its engagement with the relational and affective domain. Social media's power, in this regard, is exacerbated by its ability to short-cut through to engage affect through conversation, art, image and music. For women, the Internet is a new emotional and relational domain that could provide an avenue for contesting many economically rationalistic, individuating assumptions behind discourses entrenched in a certain form of masculine imaginary incorporating (literally and metaphorically) symbolic violence, competition and individualism. We suggest that these developments and potentials should be theorised through post-structural feminist thought on the body.

Taking an embodied perspective in feminist research requires walking a careful line between acknowledging the importance of the body yet avoiding naturalising and essentialist notions of the body which see sex/gender as being fixed by biology. We (the authors) see the gendered female body as being historically and socially variable, fluid and open to change. Whilst experience and performance of gender are fluid, we are still women in women's bodies and this is significant as, following de Beauvoir, the body is 'the instrument of our grasp on the world' (1952/2010).

A foundation feminist scholar in understanding the significance of the body when understanding organisational practices is Joan Acker. Acker (1990) saw that organisations are also not gender neutral places: on the contrary, she argues that gender underlies policies and practices used to construct organisations and to provide the common-sense ground for theorising about them. One common-sense assumption is that workers are disembodied, but Acker instead suggests the worker is coded as man with a man's body, sexuality and relationships so that images of 'men's bodies and masculinity pervade organizational processes, marginalizing women and contributing to the maintenance of gender segregation in organizations' (1990: 139). These structures of gender difference are deeply embedded substructures in social and organisational life. However, in terms of theorising about women's activism on the Internet about organisational injustice, we need to comprehend women's gendered relations in the world beyond the specific framework of organisational structures. In this respect, psychoanalytic feminism offers a way to connect the gendered body to the larger cultural and social world.

Psychoanalytic feminism offers a radical notion: female corporality produces the very shape of thoughts. In making this suggestion Irigaray contested western rationality and affirmed female embodiment as the centre of theorising about women (as discussed in Lennon 2010). Irigaray used Lacan's idea of the 'imaginary' to suggest that our (female embodied) relations to objects and others are governed by emotion and passion (affect). Irigaray saw that affect guides our relations (not truth or falsity) to the symbolic and imaginary (which are interconnected). For Irigaray, in culture, or the social imaginary, there is plenitude of the masculine, with the effect being that the feminine is seen as threatening, chaotic and formless. Irigaray, importantly, challenged the status of the inevitability of the dominance of the masculine and suggested reconstructing the symbolic imaginary of the female body to make it more liveable and positive for women. This

reimaging is a creative process, not one that can be achieved through accurate descriptions of women's bodies as they 'really are' (through science). Irigaray's reintegration of emotions with the body and thought and her argument that feminism should be concerned with reimagining provides a useful tool through which to think about how women are using social media in activism.

Our second case example is about an online protest regarding the sexual objectification of women in an airline safety video. Using Irigaray, we can understand the deleterious impact of the sexual objectification of women in media images which is related to the ways women are objectified in images more generally. Being, or becoming, a woman in a woman's body involves living our bodies in an objectified way: that is, we internalise the gaze of the other and produce our bodies for others (including other women) to look at. Body image or bodily imaginaries stress that this awareness we have of our bodies is not a neutral or purely cognitive response: we experience our bodily contours with emotional and affective salience through our relations in and with culture. The social and cultural imaginary we have in our heads about women's bodies leads to a distorted view of ourselves, giving us completely unrealistic expectations about ideal body shapes and beauty, causing neurosis that can eventuate in eating disorders like bulimia and anorexia. One key strategy for contesting the inaccurate portrayal of women in the cultural and social imaginary is to offer alternative visions that make more emotional and imaginative sense to us.

These reimaginings can have a real bodily impact on girls and women. As an example, we can see the negative impact of social norms on girls' bodily comportment through using Iris Young's (2004) example of the inhibited bodily intentionality that restricts girls in their engagement with their environment when they learn to 'throw like a girl'. Young argues that girls internalise the negative connotation implicit in the saying 'throwing like a girl'. In their pre-reflexive engagement, they throw 'I cannot' instead of 'I can'. However, if girls are offered positive imaginaries of women's bodies-in-action, where they see the ways girls actually throw (in the many ways that girls can throw), then the symbolic violence against girls' bodies, summarised in the phrase 'throwing like a girl', can be shown for what it is – hurtful, inaccurate and fundamentally sexist.

In the following sections, we outline and discuss two recent events that involved the social media in different ways in order to foreground ways that women (and men) have contested sexist managerial practices. By undertaking this analysis, we hope to provide theoretical insight into the role social media can play in women's activism at the collective level.

## Two incidents: pay equity and a safety video

### Menstruation and pay equity

The first incident relates to a highly polarising event that occurred in New Zealand in 2011 when the entire country seemed to erupt into a public furore about menstruation in the workplace. The genesis of the event was a comment made by Alasdair Thompson, then the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Employers and Manufacturers' Association Northern (EMA), the largest representative of private sector employers in New Zealand, in a radio debate about pay equity also involving Helen Kelly (President of the Council of Trade Unions (CTU)). Thompson said that the pay gap existed because 'men and women are different' as women have babies which means they take time out of their careers. Thompson then went on to link this statement to his belief, which he grounded in

'statistics' that women take more sick leave because once a month they have 'sick problems' (Lew 2011). In response to this public comment, there was an immediate mass and social media reaction that increased in intensity when Thompson issued two public apologies: one on a morning breakfast TV show and then on *Campbell Live*, a popular evening news format television show. The apologies were not perceived by many to be authentic and thus back-fired: Thompson did not retract his statement but went on to justify his belief by citing evidence from his own workplace and experience and also referred to some questionable research that was later linked to through social media and in news reports to provide more proof for the contention about women taking more sick leaves (Ichino & Moretti 2009; Herrmann & Rockoff 2012). The full and edited versions of the *Campbell* interview were posted on news sites, several bloggers gave their opinion, and the outpouring of highly-charged commentary continued.

Posted comments were highly polarised and ferocious. One of the reasons for the intense feelings expressed during this incident is no doubt because the topic of menstruation is usually repressed and discourses around periods are so strong, involving shame and hygiene (Shail & Howie 2005) and yet periods are an ordinary everyday experience for most working women. We (the authors) noticed when reading online commentary that women spoke with eloquence and intensity about menstruating at work; that is, about being women (with bodies) at work and about how being women at work made them feel. We have written on this eloquence elsewhere (Sayers & Jones 2014). Social media enabled these feelings and thoughts to be shared about something usually repressed – kept quiet and hidden – and thus we consider this event to provide a unique archive of evidence of discourses around women's bodies at work, how women feel about their own bodies at work and the potential of social media to help women share their collective experiences.

We harvested public comments from 10 websites. We did not examine Facebook and Twitter (we look at the use of Twitter in the second event); we only examined comments that were anonymously and directly posted in response to news media coverage of the event by well-known New Zealand journalists and bloggers. Facebook and Twitter messages are less anonymous than commentary on blogs and news media: on news websites any member of the public can comment, they do not need to have a personal profile, and so individuals are relatively anonymous as their comments were only shown alongside whatever name or pseudonym they chose to use when commenting. The commentary on Facebook and Twitter was very similar to the commentary on the sites we analysed.

Five hundred messages were initially collected, and 357 remained after replications, and non-relevant comments were deleted. The unit of analysis was a message (also called a post or comment) which could be a few words long up to a lengthy paragraph. In the first coding phase, posts were allocated according to whether they were generally negative or positive. Opinions were expressed in four main ways: posters directed their comments towards Thompson and his comments; posters agreed or disagreed with the journalist's view expressed in the blog or article; posters agreed or disagreed with previous posters; or posters addressed the issue of pay equity more generally. Posts were coded P (positive), N (negative) or U (unknown). For example, we coded the following post as P, showing positive orientation:

> The problem with Alasdair Thompson's comments is not so much that they aren't true but that he chooses to focus on the weaknesses of some women rather than their strengths … In comparing men and women has he considered weaknesses in men that may lessen their

productivity or the quality of their work? The comments are stupid because they are so blinkered. He IS sexist because he chooses to ignore the value of women. (PN 240)

An N code was assigned to the following post for expressing negative orientation:

> I see Jenny Shipley is still gunning for Alistair Thompson's head to be delivered to her on a plate. I don't know why she thinks that displaying excessive vindictive bitchiness is likely to improve the employment chances of women, let alone their pay rates. (PN 222)

As mentioned above, gender was allocated to poster. There is some disagreement about anonymity on the Internet and how different genders post, especially in hostile debates (Herring 2000). In the present example, we took the following steps to try and be reasonably certain as to the gender of the poster. First and foremost, we accept that there will always be some indecision about gender on the Internet but in the context of this particular controversy gender was salient so often declared either through identifying first names or because posters provided self-revealing statements that indicated their gender; posters mentioned they had a husband or wife, or talked about their female colleagues in ways that suggested they were male or female. Finally, many women spoke about their experiences with their periods in their comments. We took a conservative approach in allocating gender to posts. For example, a poster Chris could be either male or female, and in the absence of any other indication (e.g. writing about his or her experiences menstruating), this person was allocated to the category of U or Unknown gender. This conservative approach explains the high number of persons allocated to the unknown gender category (Female (125), Male (69) and Unknown (163)).

Analysis showed that overall posters were polarised with twice the amount of comments being positive (233 posts) than negative (101) with the remainder being neutral. More women than men posted positively in support of pay equity and/or contested views women's periods made them less productive, or criticised the views expressed by Thompson. There was a high number of negative anonymous posts.

The first coding phase of the analysis confirmed that the debate was highly polarised and that women posted most. Unusually for the hostile context, men appeared to post anonymously more than women (Herring 2000). One striking feature of the posts was anger and outrage. Consequently, we also looked at the emotional intensity of the posts. Posts were all coded according to emotional intensity. Initially, we looked for a range of emotions on an emotional spectrum (the Circumplex Model of Affect in Larson et al. 2002) but noticed that anger was the main emotion. Consequently, we chose Rubin's (1986) gradients of anger intensity in relation to an event in order to understand the emotional intensity of the posts. Emotions used in this categorisation are, in order of intensity: rage, anger, sorrow, grief, frustration, disappointment and neutral. As it is difficult to differentiate between rage and anger based on Internet textual evidence, the terms anger and rage were collapsed. After initial categorisations, Rubin's categories were reduced to three categories for the purposes of reporting: rage/anger (2); disappointment/grief/frustration/annoyance (including sarcasm and irony) (1) and neutral (0). Coding was conducted conservatively. Posters used a number of writing conventions to communicate anger and rage: abusive terms like 'femo-nazi', 'moron', curse words, symbols (e.g. #?!*!), threats of violence and flaming tones were used to indicate the poster was angry, and thus assigned a 2. Otherwise, comments were coded as a 1. In this category of less overt anger, we included sarcastic and ironic posts (even though posters may have been very angry).

The findings indicate, put simply, that this event provoked howls of outrage. Two hundred and seventy-seven posts were categorised as angry/very angry; 72 posts were categorised as milder forms of negative emotion; and only eight were identified as being neutral in tone.

Who were the angriest – men or women? Emotional intensity was comparable on both sides of the debate; that is, positive and negative comments were similar in their intensity, although there were almost three times as many angry positive comments as angry negative comments. Although about twice as many women commented than men, their levels of emotional intensity were very similar. That is, men and women were angry in about the same measure, but more women posted than men.

In line with our interest in embodiment and emotions, we considered that it was important to understand whether or not gender was significant in the intensity of anger simply because, as the issue was about menstruation, we noticed during the debate that there were many accusations that women were being 'over-sensitive' about the issue. We established through our analysis of posts that outrage was definitely expressed, but women were no more or less emotional than men. What is significant in the context of our argument is that women mobilised their anger in the context of a political issue (pay equity) in relation to the knowledge their bodies gave them about pay equity (Sayers & Jones 2014). Their anger at what was perceived as an injustice provoked anger from others defending the status quo. In the discussion section of this article, we tease out these themes of embodiment, anger and political justice in relation to women's anger. Before we do this, we discuss another issue related to organisational practice and sexism that was confronted in social media.

### Safety video and sexual attractiveness

On 7 February 2014, Air New Zealand pre-released the-making-of 'the world's most beautiful safety video' (Scoop 2014) when it partnered with the *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit franchise to produce 'Safety in Paradise', which featured some well-known female models and ex-*Sports Illustrated* cover-girl Christie Brinkley. The release of the safety video was intended to concur with the start of *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit's 50th anniversary, and its aim was both to engage customers in core safety messages and to drive passenger traffic on its Auckland–Rarotonga and Los Angeles–Rarotonga services. The Air New Zealand Head of Global Brand Development, Jodi Williams, linked the video to *Sports Illustrated* brand power and thus the global attention it would attract. The safety video, which was promoted through social media and posted on YouTube, immediately 'went viral' as intended, but the video attracted both negative and positive feedback. Almost immediately, news reports noted the polarisation, but Air New Zealand did not appear immediately concerned; they have a history of releasing risqué safety videos that attract public and media attention. Eventually, however, a woman, Natasha Young (2014), began a social media campaign to protest what she perceived as the safety video's sexism. After contacting Air New Zealand and not being satisfied with their response to her concerns, she started a petition on website Change.org, arguing that the video made a mockery of safety and was offensive to women and service staff like cabin crew:

> This video completely disregards passengers who find it offensive for religious reasons, who have body image struggles, who are parents concerned about their children's impressionable nature, who believe women deserve more respect, and who have teenage daughters who deserve more respect. This video is culturally insensitive; it disregards those who are

conservative by nature and are uncomfortable with its imagery and disregards passengers who have been exposed to sexual assault. This video creates an unnecessarily difficult and uncomfortable working environment for its female staff, which goes against the entire nature of safety. (Young 2014)

She went on to say that the video forced itself upon the passengers as it was played in the small confines of a seat on an aircraft, and there was no option to turn it off or get away from it.

The petition gained 11,049 supporters, and even though Air New Zealand denied that the Twitter petition had anything to do with it (Bowman 2014), by July, news reports were saying that the video was being phased out. Ms Young (2014) attributed this to the Twitter campaign.

Young's petition gained immediate support showing her anger and opinions were shared by others. However, other reactions vociferously criticised Young and others for posting online that they found the video offensive. A CNN news site invited comments, posing the question, 'Air New Zealand's new swimsuit safety video: Fun or offensive?' There were 523 comments posted, most of which eviscerated feminists and anyone who had issues with the video. One typical comment complemented the attractiveness of the women (and men) in the video and accused those posting in opposition of being 'feminists', jealous and vindictive (CNN 2014):

> Leave it to feminists to complain about a video featuring attractive women and to demonize them for taking advantage of what nature gifted them with. They sound like angry fat people. This is the exact same type of animosity you hear from obese women when discussing women who are fit. They feel threatened by a woman who is considered attractive by the majority of society. It's jealousy. These women are comfortable in their skin and other women just can't stand it.

Several replies to this comment agreed with its sentiment with attacks on feminists typifying many of the posts. One woman disagreed and posted angrily that she found the video offensive.

> YOU ARE WRONG!!! I AM A FEMINIST AS WELL AS A BIG BONED WOMAN … AND I FOUND THIS VIDEO EXTREMELY OFFENSAVE!!! WHY SHOULD A VIDEO ABOUT 'SAFETY' FEATURE … GROSS, MALNOURISHED MODELS??? THE POINT OF THE VIDEO IS TO TEACH PEOPLE WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGANCY, NOT TO OOGLE OVER THE WOMEN!! ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU ARE ADVERTIZING THIS TO OTHER COUNTRIES!!!! BY THE WAY, I AM CERTAINLY NOT JEALOUS, I JUST DONT THINK BEING AS SKINNY AS A POLE IS BEAUTIFUL!!!

This poster was then attacked because she was 'fat', a feminist, jealous and 'technically incompetent' for leaving the caps-lock on.

In this case example, we can see social media being used by women (and men) in a petition to protest a video felt to be sexist and inappropriate. At the same time, we can see others using social media to give voice to defend the status quo. In this regard, we have emphasised the reaction against the protest because the protest exposes the symbolic violence that keeps the larger cultural and social imaginary in place.

Why is this larger social and cultural imaginary important to organisational practice? Any particular airline is connected to a larger service eco-system (Akaka et al. 2012); not only other airlines and the services that support them, but larger social structures as well. With the advent of the Internet and the use of it to communicate brand, it is not possible

for organisations to ignore how their messages might reinforce or destabilise larger discourses within which their messages circulate; their official communications are threads in the weft and weave of larger discourses. They are interpreted by readers of their messages in the context of these larger discourses which signify the predominantly masculine social and cultural imaginary in which we all live.

There is not any necessarily conscious intent to be sexist on the part of organisations and their management actors, including Air New Zealand. Airlines operate in an intensely competitive global market, and they differentiate from each other on their service. The airline safety video is obviously a key communication platform for the airline brand because all passengers must, by law, watch and comply with safety procedures. Attractive bodies are routinely used to attract attention to the safety videos and make them more watchable; the use of attractive bodies to communicate brand is inculcated into the culture of airlines (Tyler & Abbott 1998). However, as Acker (1990) has pointed out, the female body exists in organisational space on male terms. Consequently, gender differences are deeply embedded in the substructures of the airline industry. When the superstructure of power is criticised, especially when it is criticised by women, the forces that stabilise the cultural and social systems are made apparent when people launch to its defence. In the discussion section, we emphasise that it is not just the direct criticisms of sexist practices that cause organisations to revise their practices. It is also the reaction to the criticism by those who defend organisational practices that provide the tipping point for organisations to change, and the intensity of emotional outrage is a key reason for this.

Symbolic violence becomes very visible; it becomes imminently clear that women are kept 'in their place' (in society) by violent symbolic acts that read everything women do or say through either the sexualisation of their bodies or their reading as unruly maternal bodies. Susie Orbach, a well-known psychotherapist and writer, when commenting on the problem of symbolically violent Internet troll 'rape gifs' and other violent communications directed at women bloggers, diagnosed the problem thus:

> If you set women up as sexual objects which society has, no matter what we are doing, that makes women into objects rather than human beings and what you create is a situation in which women who then stand up and make arguments about things, terrify these men … [their symbolically violent response] has nothing to do with the content of what they [women] are saying. Women are supposed to be sexual objects – we're still not supposed to be thinking, feeling, complex human beings. It [the problem of rape troll posts] is due to the continual representation of women as just beauties, the attempt to reduce women to a surface on which we project sexuality. (cited in Thorpe & Rogers 2011)

### Discussion: women's bodies, anger and political action

It is evident from the two events described above that anger is the primary emotion being expressed in social media in relation to perceptions of sexism, and there is a rage-full reaction in response. In both the case examples, emotions are polarised, with comments emanating from emotional bodies, both female and male. The primary emotion is clearly one of anger, even rage. For those opposing what is perceived to be sexist practice, there is righteous anger. For those opposed to the critical voice, there is the expression of a different sort of anger.

How can we envisage these developments in relation to anger? As mentioned in the introduction, Castells (2012) sees emotions as being a key aspect of horizontal communication networks and the dynamics of social movements using the Internet. One key

issue that arises from our case examples is the polarisation of anger and the increased likelihood of social instability and the anxiety this might provoke.

Anger is often understood in simplistic terms. Anger is often discussed in the psychological literature as a negative and unstable emotion which is a disorder requiring resolution. But anger is not necessarily a negative emotion. Anger is fundamentally ambiguous and has multiple causes some of which might have negative consequences, but anger is certainly not a universal undifferentiated emotional phenomenon.

Anger is a social and cultural phenomenon as well as a psychological one: it is definitely differentiated according to social status and bisected by characteristics such as gender, age and race. Anger can have positive consequences and is potentially productive in social relations: the expression of anger can often have positive outcomes such as resolution of conflict in interpersonal relations, or the expression of repressed emotions which has damaged the ability of an individual to mature.

Anger is less acceptable from some social groups in society than others: for example, there are strong taboos against subordinated group anger like certain socially oppressed ethnic groups (Holmes 2004). Women's anger is normally repressed in social life; it is less socially acceptable for women to express anger. Holmes argues that women's anger is acceptable in certain contexts: for instance, in the kitchen, during childbirth and if the anger is on someone else's behalf. On the other hand, anger from menstruating women, for example, is not socially acceptable: anger in this context is often trivialised and called irrational (Shuttle & Redgrove 1978; Young 2004).

Not all researchers have had a narrow conception of anger as merely a deviant psychological feeling. Researchers in the sociology of emotions have looked at the role of anger in social injustice (Turner & Stets 2006; Turner 2009). Holmes (2004), for instance, focused specifically on women's anger in a political context (disagreements between European and Māori feminists in New Zealand) and emphasised that anger is situ-relational, meaning that anger needs to be understood in its context and as a co-relational construct. Holmes draws on the post-colonial theories of Bhabba (1990) and McClintock (1994/2013) to theorise anger in the context of political collective action and emphasises the essential ambiguity of anger which makes it fluid. Holmes contends that anger in the political context must be understood in its local and historical specifics and not as if anger is virtuous in and of itself. She suggests using the term 'angriness' as opposed to 'anger' which makes anger mobile which accentuates its fundamental ambivalence: '…it is part of a politics of struggle that takes place in/between and through space/time and bodies … Like politics, anger is always in movement' (Holmes 2004: 211–212). Holmes argues for a gendered and located understanding of anger, one that engages with social and economic power and is located around deconstructing ruptures that form in social life. Holmes states: 'The ambivalence of anger must therefore be analysed within particular socio-economic contexts' (2004: 212).

How does our argument so far about Internet social activism, embodiment and emotions relate to women and collectivism in relation to work? The two case examples we discussed provide examples of clear ruptures occurring in the ordinary fabric of social life. These incidents are serendipitous and to an extent unpredictable. They seem different to social movements or to union action in that they do not appear to be connected, even loosely, to any particular lobby-group like a trade union. Yet, both the incidents are associated, by proxy, with feminism, and in the first incident to unionism. Both relate to organisational and employment issues, but both issues are trans-organisational; the nexus of protest in each case is anger over perceived sexism. The comments we have examined indicate that people are very angry – with Thompson, with Air New Zealand,

with unionists, with feminists, with other commentators, with their employers and co-workers and with the world in general. Anger in both the incidents needs to be framed as ambivalent, emanating from the body, not separated from the mind, and constantly moving in a historically situated, performative and socially constructed world. In both the incidents, people expressed their anger online, and there was a definite impact on organisational practice.

The implications of the case examples went beyond just the initial issue that triggered the event. The impact of Thompson's original comment (which he still insists was misconstrued and taken out of context (Keall 2013)) was exacerbated by angry and abusive online responses commenting about women, their periods, moods and other related, embodied features of being a woman that made them 'less productive' (e.g. taking sick leave, having children and therefore being less reliable, being physically weaker). In the Air New Zealand incident, we can see one offended woman mobilise over 11,000 others to sign a petition showing that her feelings were not isolated, but shared by a significant number of other people (men and women included). They felt angry that the video so obviously sexualised the female body in a trivial way for the male gaze. Protesters were attacked for being feminist, fat and unattractive. Both the incidents can be read as protests against the enactment of a masculine cultural imaginary which narrowly interprets women through the shameful and unruly maternal body and the sexualised female body. In both the incidents, there was an attempt by citizens to provide an alternative truth. In both, there was a reaction to the protests which unleashed a deep well of resentment and anger against women.

The negative and vociferous reaction to women's 'collective' social activism on the Internet is just as revealing as the activism itself. When women say, 'I can' and contest that they 'cannot', and thereby move themselves from the margins to the centre, they replace the social imaginary of the female body with a more empowering vision, and at the same time draw attention to the primary process by which they are marginalised – symbolic violence. As the comments in both the incidents show, the move from the margins is accompanied by an equally if not more strident howl of outrage from those whose imaginary is disrupted, and the rage from those opposing criticism shows how deep the confusion about the social place of the female body is, and how damaging it is to both women and men.

## Implications and conclusion

The key contribution of this discussion is to highlight the significance of social media to women's 'collective' action and social protest around working issues. Clearly, women are acting collectively in many ways through the Internet to forward women's rights at work. This article provides an initial discussion of the potential of social media in activism. Both the incidents had an impact in the real world. Also, a further contribution of this article is to advance some ideas about how we might theoretically frame developments in future research.

We argue here that it is necessary to analyse women's use of social media from an embodied perspective that can incorporate the emotional dimension. Anger in particular needs to be better understood in relation to embodiment, collectivist social activism and the use of social media. In particular, we need to understand in more detail the notion of righteous anger as it is enacted through the Internet and the links between anger, embodiment, logical thought and ethics. Women are clearly using the Internet to protest

unfair practices in organisations, sometimes quite effectively. This is a new domain for women's collective action that needs further research and theorising.

In this article, we can see that women's anger was attacked, in both the incidences, on the basis it was women's anger and so perceived as irrational and emotive therefore lacking the moral authority to comment on issues related to women. There is a lack of attention in academic research about righteous anger, and there are many assumptions about gender and anger – especially when anger is expressed by women leaders such as politicians, unionists, journalists and feminists – that undermine women's ability and right to be heard in public. Holmes (2004) argues that anger itself provides the possibilities for change, and so the Internet as a site of expressed fluid angriness needs to be better understood. Anger has transformative possibilities because of its very nexus in ambivalence (which enables change). Angriness signals a threat to dominant discourses, and righteous anger may initiate others to radically rethink their position vis-à-vis subordinates. In further research on ruptures in the social fabric of organisational life, each incident should be understood in its specific historical and situated context using theoretical concepts fluid enough to capture the embodied dimensions of anger as well as the social, cultural and historical constituents that fuel outrage.

Angriness is relational. McClintock (1994/2013) says it is better to see angriness as part of communicative processes that produces subjects in relation to others, and so, if angriness is understood socially, repulsion will be an outcome. Angriness creates polarisation and crisis, and out of crisis comes the potential for change. There is always risk involved in change motivated by angriness. Oppressors may react with aggression and hostility which make the expression of anger risky (for women). Angriness can foster conservative resentment and can target certain people, for example, women politicians, feminists and union leaders, for blame. These are not reasons to discontinue angriness, but it does highlight that, in the longer term, there does need to be more understanding about the outcomes of angriness in the context of political movements and strategies need to be developed to mitigate and challenge the potential deleterious effects of righteous angriness so that women do not feel cowed-down by the diatribe that we inevitably attract when we speak out. These areas of women's collective action, and the reaction to it, need focused analysis so that women can participate fully in net communities to forward the rights of women.

An area for further research is the interrelationship between mass media and social media in framing ruptures. The mass media, in both the events we have discussed, had crucial roles to play in mediating between social media protest and businesses. By implication, social media should be a central part of union communications and strategising (Gahan & Pekarek 2013). Where there is anger, there is opportunity for politicisation and mobilisation. For these reasons alone, unions should take note of the types of protest activities being independently initiated by citizens not normally associated with the union movement. There may be opportunities for strategic alliances with Internet social action groups. There may be possibilities for building union profiles through events that occur spontaneously and that unions are prioritising (e.g. equal pay or the living wage). There may be possibilities for semi-autonomous activism sponsored by unions, but not directly emanating from them. We hope we have made the case that social media definitely enables protest about organisational issues affecting women and further research is required.

Anger motivates political action (Holmes 2010; Castells 2012), but anger is undertheorised in relation to embodiment and the material practices that lead to inequality and cause social protest. At the level of women's collectivism, our article contributes by

highlighting the importance of the social and mass media in the framing and opportunity for influencing impromptu issues that spontaneously emerge in society around work that people feel about very strongly. Women's collectives of all types, including unions, need to be taking these incidents of women's collective online autonomous action seriously and work out how to more effectively engage with such spontaneous outbreaks of anger as they are likely to continue to occur and become more frequent.

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