

Temporality and gendered agency: Menopausal subjectivities in women's work

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Abstract

This article advances feminist organizational theorizing about embodiment and subjectivity by investigating menopause at work as a temporally constituted phenomenon. We ask how time matters in women's embodied and subjective experiences of menopause at work. Theoretically, we draw on feminist writers McNay and Grosz to explore the relationship between gendered agency and time in a corpus of 48 qualitative interviews conducted with women employed at two Australian universities about their experiences of menopause. Our empirical analysis identifies three temporal modalities – episodic, helical and relational – that show how gendered organizational subjectivities are not simply temporally situated, but created in and through distinct temporal forces. We offer two contributions to feminist organizational theory: first, by illuminating the ontological role played by time in gendered agency; and second, by fleshing out the notion of a 'body politics of surprise' with implications for feminist studies of organizational embodiment, politics and ethics.

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Introduction

This article develops a distinctive account of the temporality of gendered agency in organizations and its implications for feminist thinking on embodiment and subjectivity in management and organization studies (MOS) based on a qualitative study of women, work and the menopause. Informed by McNay's (2000) generative paradigm for gender and agency, and Grosz's Bergsonian reading of time (Grosz, 1994, 2004, 2005), we propose that organizational embodiment and subjectivity are inherently temporal phenomena, and central to the conditions of possibility for gendered agency. Through our interview-based study with 48 working women, we explore how their experiences of gendered embodiment and subjectivity are not simply located in time, but constituted by it. The study suggests that the menopausal body at work, and organizational embodiment and subjectivity more generally, are underpinned by retentive and protensive temporal forces that manifest empirically in three distinct temporal modalities (episodic, helical and relational). These temporal forces furnish the conditions of possibility for gendered agency in organizational settings. In turn, the study advances recent debates on the ontology, politics and ethics of organizational embodiment (Dale and Latham, 2015; Pullen and Rhodes, 2014), and develops the notion of a 'body politics of surprise' to illuminate the importance of temporal modes of agency specifically manifest in the creative and subversive aspects of menopausal embodiment. Here, our bodies are central to the possibility (but never the determination) of a future that Grosz (2005: 5) sees as unrecognizable and experimental – a view of change (personal, social, organizational) without a predetermined agenda or prescription.

Our contribution to organizational embodiment and subjectivity emerges from an empirical investigation of a significant, but significantly understudied, ageful and gendered bodily event – menopause. The voices of menopausal women, and their experiences of work, are very rarely heard in MOS. We feel that attention to an issue that a significant portion of the working population will experience is long overdue in our discipline, and that the silence on this topic in MOS – including feminist approaches to MOS – needs to be rectified. Menopause is still a taboo subject for 'polite' conversation, especially in workplaces where women – and men – are often too embarrassed to talk about it. However, with women encouraged to remain in paid employment for longer, millions of women go through menopause in workplace settings (Jack et al., 2016). Guidance on menopause and the workplace has begun to emerge (e.g. Faculty of Occupational Medicine, 2016), and researching this ageing cohort of women and this female-specific experience is vital for organizations, feminist scholars and female employees alike.

Dominant menopausal knowledge upholds a medicalized view that assumes a problematic and masculinist mind–body dualism whilst pathologizing (ageing) women's bodies in systems of patriarchy (Ussher, 2002). In this respect, prevailing biomedical approaches to menopause echo the desexualizing and disembodiment impulse of organizational theory and practice that continues to mask the embodied gendered realities of

organizational life (Mavin and Grandy, 2016). Exploring menopause at work offers considerable potential for advancing feminist organizational thinking on embodiment and subjectivity as it brings together concerns with the sexed body, organization and time – three aspects that have yet to be collectively considered in empirical or theoretical terms within MOS. Although time has been a latent aspect of much of the work exploring organizational embodiment, we know that distinctive temporal regimes are central to power and organizing (Bailey and Madden, 2015; Halford and Leonard, 2006; Ybema, 2010), and that professional identities and aspirations are subject to change and reconfiguration over time (Ibarra, 1999). Similarly, age-related (qua time) health and well-being events (including pregnancy, menopause and others) can have a significant influence on our perception and experience of work (Gattrell, 2013; Haynes, 2008). However, a consideration of how the sexed body in organizations is understood in the context of its own temporality, and as a productive site of continuity *and* change, is typically overlooked in existing scholarship. If ‘bodies are to be reconceived, not only must their *matter and form* be rethought, but so too must their environment and *spatio-temporal location*’ (Grosz, 1995: 84; original emphasis). Thus, we pose our overarching research question as follows: ‘How does time matter to women’s embodied and subjective experiences of menopause at work?’

To explore this question, we develop a theoretical framework informed by Grosz’s and McNay’s respective writings on embodiment and subjectivity. McNay’s ideas about temporality, gender and agency explore the enduring tension between (i) subjection as informed by early Foucauldian conceptions of the body and agency, and (ii) generative modes of agency that may ‘institute new and unanticipated modes of behaviour’ (McNay, 2000: 22–23). We extend McNay’s line of thought through Grosz’s feminist interpretation of Henri Bergson’s conception of time as duration. Here, time is a force that ‘motivates and informs ... [the universe’s] most intimate living details’ (Grosz, 2005: 1). Specifically, we focus on the ontological significance of duration as the ‘flow that connects the future to the past that gave it impetus’ (Grosz, 2004: 184), and a mode of becoming in which the biological and the cultural creatively co-evolve. Following Grosz, the question of becomings directs our attention towards consideration of what she calls a ‘politics of surprise’, asking ‘how becomings are possible, what forms they take in biological, cultural, political, and technological processes, what transformations they may effect and what implications they have for how we understand ourselves and our world’ (Grosz, 2005: 2). However, rather than focus on the grand narratives of evolution that partly inform Grosz’s (2004) philosophical thought, we suggest that our organizational lives are crafted through a more intimate *body* politics of surprise that abounds in the unanticipated possibilities and consequences of temporal bodily experience.

The article is structured as follows. The first section provides a selective overview of menopause research, noting menopause scholars’ paucity of attention to workplace contexts. It is followed by the literature on embodiment and subjectivity in feminist and organizational research, drawing particular attention to the underexplored role of temporality. We outline selected writings by McNay and Grosz on embodiment, agency and time to provide a theoretical vehicle for our analysis. We then present details of our interview study of women’s experiences of menopause in two Australian universities, followed by the findings. In the final section, we discuss the implications of our findings

for menopausal women's constructions of meaningful work and organizational relations, and propose contributions to debates on organizational embodiment and subjectivity, and to feminist organizational politics.

Organizing the menopausal body

The meaning of menopause has transformed over time from an organically situated part of a woman's life to a bodily problem – a 'women's problem' – that requires special medical attention and treatment (Foxcroft, 2011). Though it is not a unitary discourse (Komesaroff et al., 1997), a biomedically driven paradigm primarily conceives menopause as an endocrinological phenomenon manifest in changes in a woman's reproductive system (with associated 'symptoms') resulting from decreasing production of oestrogen and eventuating in the cessation of menstruation. Relatedly, but distinctively, psychosocial approaches (Utian, 2005) focus to a greater degree on understanding the psychological impacts of the menopause alongside key environmental factors to enable women to better 'manage' a 'healthy menopause'. Yet there is no universal 'syndrome' surrounding menopause, and not all women are symptomatic or experience symptoms as a problem that interferes with their daily lives (Mishra and Kuh, 2006). Furthermore, culture and context matter in shaping different social constructions and bodily processes of menopause, both across countries (Lock, 1994) and generations of women (Utz, 2011). The world of paid employment is typically neglected in biomedical and psychosocial menopause research, though a nascent body of survey-based and cross-sectional studies has identified that particular elements of organizational life such as supervisory support, workplace design or work stress can ameliorate or exacerbate symptom experience (Bariola et al., 2017; Griffiths et al., 2013). However, the lived experience of going through menopause in the workplace is underexplored in menopause research.

Feminist scholars have critically interpreted and challenged the 'truth' promoted in the dominant symptomological approach to menopause in terms of a problematization and objectification of women's bodies under a patriarchal medical gaze (Martin, 1997; Perz and Ussher, 2008). For example, the World Health Organization's (1981) early definition of menopause as 'oestrogen deficiency syndrome' constructs the ageing female body within the language of deficit, medically and socially impaired, and one marked by decline (e.g. loss of youth) and shame. Such a signification is situated in the broader denigration of women's bodies which anchor her to her sex, and profited from by the global pharmaceutical industry (Germaine Greer's so-called 'Masters of Menopause') which offers the possibility of controlling symptoms through hormonal treatment (Leng, 1997). Agentic appreciations of how women navigate the challenges or resist the dominant discourse on menopause is not common in menopausal research; nor is any consideration of the link between embodiment, time and agency in workplace settings.

Criticisms of menopausal paradigms reflect feminist debates taken up in organizational scholarship regarding how gender orders are structurally and culturally reproduced in the workplace with respect to the body (Acker, 1990). Organizational scholars recognize that bodies are not purely brute flesh that exist outside cultural conventions and to which human experience can be reduced; nor are they solely a product of signification determined by cultural scripts, or discourses, written onto the body (Cunliffe and

Coupland, 2012; Mavin and Grandy, 2016; Pecis, 2016). This dialectic plays out most significantly in the ways women's bodies or other non-hegemonic modes of embodiment are rendered 'matter out of place', positioned as a threat or a danger to the spoken or unspoken social order of the organization on account of their 'leakiness', unboundedness, unpredictability or unreliability (Gattrell, 2013; Haynes, 2008; Sayers and Jones, 2015). In this respect, so-called 'menopausal misbehaviour' (Goldstein, 2000: 321) is another example of the lifelong subjugation of women's bodies (in this case her reproductive body) to organizational norms. However, menopause may be considered different from, say, pregnancy, in being symptomatically distinctive as an embodied experience, and symbolically conflated with negative connotations in western societies of being/becoming old. Often marked by changes to women's own biological cycles (e.g. heavier or unpredictable bleeding) and temporal rhythms (e.g. through sleep disturbance), menopausal bodies nonetheless hold the potential to resist, threaten and challenge normative modes of mastery, linearity and predictability associated with masculinist clock time (Knights and Odih, 1995).

Embodiment, agency and time in feminist and organizational research

Embodiment and agency are core concepts for feminist scholarship that have been taken up in MOS to investigate, broadly speaking, the topics of subjectivity and identity. Embodiment theory places the body at the centre of feminist analysis, simultaneously challenging the disembodied tendencies of scholarly disciplines like philosophy (Grosz, 2004) and organization theory (Acker, 1990), and the mind-body dualism that diminishes women by tying them to an inferior status connoted by the body as nature. Recent feminist organizational scholars have addressed such matters either explicitly, or through work that uses feminist embodiment theorists. For example, Pullen and Rhodes (2015) explore embodiment and ethics inspired by the feminist philosopher Diprose (2002), whereas a number of others have drawn on Butler (Harding, 2013; Riach et al., 2016), Irigaray (Fotaki et al., 2014; Vacchani, 2012) and Grosz (Bryant and Jaworski, 2011; Pullen and Vacchani, 2013; Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009). Within such accounts, we see agency as focusing attention on the conditions of possibility that are generative of women's capacity for reflection, resistance and change. Feminist considerations of time and temporality in relation to embodiment and agency are less common, and have yet to make inroads into the MOS lexicon. For example, Skeggs' (1997) and Ahmed's (2006) engagement of phenomenology and queer studies implicitly index feminist concerns with time, social reproduction and lived experience, but do not place a systematic focus on temporality. Lois McNay's (2000) sympathetic critique of early feminist post-Foucauldian work on embodiment, gender and agency (specifically Butler, 1993; Diprose, 1994; Grosz, 1994) is an exception.

McNay defines embodiment as broadly concerned with 'a lived set of embodied potentialities rather than [an] externally imposed set of constraining norms' through which the subject comes into being. These potentialities are constituted by 'unfinished and unstable elements' and a 'univocity of mind and body' (McNay, 2000: 32). For McNay, time is a key component of embodiment approaches, yet she critiques early

feminist work for its reliance on a 'negative paradigm' (her term) for agency that propagates a 'one-sided notion of temporality as *retention* (sedimentation of disciplinary effects upon the body)' (McNay, 2000: 31). According to McNay, more varied forms of agency (not solely those exercised through disciplinary power, for instance) should be acknowledged in feminist work on gender and society, notably through 'consideration of the *protensive* dimension of the living through of embodied norms in praxis' (McNay, 2000: 31; emphasis added). She calls on scholars to give thought to the creative or imaginative possibilities for agency linked to such a temporal dimension under the aegis of what she calls a *generative* paradigm for gendered agency. This generative paradigm would work alongside the negative paradigm to create a fuller understanding of how gender identities are simultaneously durable *and* subject to change, and linked to both retentive *and* protensive (anticipatory) social action. Subsequent feminist writings have advanced some of the embodiment issues raised by McNay, in notable relation to theorizing the body and agency using (diverse) socio- and biological material perspectives (e.g. Barad, 2003; Haraway, 1988; Pitts-Taylor, 2015). However, further theorizing of the temporal aspects of embodiment is not discernible in these recent works. To this end, we turn to Elizabeth Grosz's (2004, 2005) engagement with Henri Bergson to propose a temporal ontology to further develop McNay's generative paradigm for agency.

Grosz (2005: 4) suggests that Bergson attributes to time a double role of *preservation* (conserving time in and as the past) and *dissipation* (where 'the present dissipates its force in producing a future that differs from it'). This unfolds in the variety of perceptual and material differences (within and between human subjects) that characterize the relationship between mind and matter. Bergson (1988) provides Grosz with two distinct categories of difference: those of *degree* that are spatially generated and enable measurement ('quantitative' difference); and those of *kind* that are consciously experienced in the flow of duration, fundamentally different in nature and therefore not measurable ('qualitative' difference). Grosz suggests that sexual difference (between men and women, and women's differences from each other) is an example of a difference of kind, and that such differences behold the temporal conditions of possibility for change, transformation and experimentation in the sexually specific embodied subject. This reflects her view that 'no term [e.g. the menopausal body] can remain what it is but differs from itself as time progresses' (Grosz, 2004: 160).

Based on these points, Grosz provides an important lens to advance the temporal ideas in McNay's generative paradigm with relevance for the study of embodiment and subjectivity. First, Grosz's concern with the double role of time outlined above positions women's embodied subjectification as a mode of 'unpredictable continuity', and thus encompasses both the retentive and protensive temporal forces described by McNay. Accordingly, the sexed body should not be conceived

... in terms of a fixed or ahistorical biology ... nor as a base on which cultural constructs are founded ... Instead it is an *open materiality*, a set of (possibly infinite) tendencies and *potentialities* which may be developed, yet whose development will necessarily hinder or induce other developments and other trajectories. (Grosz, 1994: 191; emphasis added)

This allows us to see the menopausal body as a sexually specific bodily event that may continue to be subjected to the particular gendered (/sexist) and age-based (/ageist)

norms of organizational and institutional contexts that produce and reproduce sexual lines of difference. But equally, menopausal corporeality has the potential to break the continuity with yet-to-be-known outcomes. It is here that Grosz's (2005) idea of the politics of surprise is germane, by drawing attention to the potential for ambivalence to exist within embodied subjects, and for that ambivalence to have temporal underpinnings. However, the partial influence of evolutionary theory (and Darwin's work in particular) on Grosz (2004) means that her focus on a politics of surprise is subsumed into a grand narrative of ontology. By comparison, we suggest that organizational lives may also highlight that a '*body* politics of surprise' is central to our experiences of time, agency and the body. As such, our interest lies in empirically exploring a body politics of surprise as a more intimate, immediate and experimental account of embodiment and subjectivity that manifests the interplay of protensive and retentive modes of agency.

Research design and method

This qualitative interview study forms part of a broader multi-paradigm, multidisciplinary mixed method project exploring female employees' (aged 40 years plus) experiences of menopause at work. The study was designed to elicit the experiences of menopause, and guided by a feminist standpoint epistemology where we sought to focus on the 'subjugated knowledge of the diversity of Women's realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated' (Hesse-Biber, 2007: 184). By choosing Higher Education as the organizational setting for our study – a knowledge-based, largely white collar sector in Australia in which 69% of the workforce is female and 50% of employees are aged 45 years and over (ABS, 2013; DEEWR, 2012) – we were very aware, as academics ourselves, of the politics of our relationship to the community we were exploring. Specifically, we recognized that our 'collection and interpretation of the data are therefore influenced by the positions and biographies of both the researchers and the participants' (van den Brink and Benschop, 2012: 512). On the one hand, we acknowledge the differences between the female researchers' academic status relative to that of certain participants in administrative or contractual positions, as well as the disciplinary divides between Business School academics and the locations of other participants. Yet, like our participants, we could not simply 'walk away' from either the research context of the institution or (for the female team members) the likelihood of menopause as a personal bodily episode. As such, we positioned ourselves as 'distant cousins', where the flux of intimacy and distance in relation to the intersection of pre-/menopausal bodies, organizational identities and overlapping experiences came together to produce our data corpus.

We interviewed 48 women across two universities, identified through institutional modes of communication, direct recruitment and snowballing by participants. Table 1 provides an overview of our sample by participants' job titles and type of work, as well as their menopausal status (the majority having personal experience of their own menopause). Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of the study participants and organizations.

The interviews were semi-structured, undertaken by female members of the research team, and based on a series of 10 fairly open-ended questions that allowed participants to talk from their own experience (and for the interview to be guided by that experience),

Table 1. Overview of participants.

	Uni A	Uni B	Total
Number of participants	26	22	48
Academic/Professional (Aca/Pro)	12/14	15/7	27/21
N = self-identified peri- or postmenopausal	22	18	40
N = Arts, Education or Social Sciences (ArtEdSS)	11	11	22
N = Science, Engineering or Medicine (SciEngMed)	5	6	11
N = Central Services (CenServ)	10	5	15

while providing some common coordinates across the interviews. Interviews ranged in length from 30 to 70 minutes, and were audio-recorded, anonymized and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Data analysis was an iterative process managed through NVivo 10. We devised an initial coding rubric on the basis of themes deducted from existing literature, inductive themes identified from initial multiple readings of the interview transcripts, and reflective notes made during and immediately after the interviews. To ensure that aspects of women's stories that at first glance appeared unique (i.e. that did not accord with other accounts to the extent that they constituted a 'code') were not eviscerated from the analysis, a 'bucket' code was created where these excerpts were held and reintroduced to interrogate our conceptual map as it developed. Some of these excerpts included seemingly contradictory accounts such as where women simultaneously called on *and* silenced bodily episodes.

As we became aware of the assertion and negotiation of organizational subjectivities, we sought to undertake a more focused analysis of how different temporal forces enabled or negated certain ways of navigating menopause and organizational embodiment. For example, we focused on instances where the changing physiological specificity of the women's bodies was afforded recognition through previous experiences of organizational embodiment (such as colleagues commenting on weight loss). Throughout this process, we discussed our emerging conceptual argument with members of the research team undertaking the survey-based aspects of the broader project, thereby echoing the sentiments behind Gilmore and Kenny's (2015) practice of 'collective reflection'. This process provided points of analytical antagonism that prompted us to question our assumptions about the processes of subjectivity at play. Together with our bucket code, it also allowed for the disruption of linear knowledge production that can occur when using CAQDAS programmes and can often sanitize marginal but highly significant empirical accounts.

Findings

For our participants, work was central to menopausal experience; it generated, exacerbated and even relieved self-identified symptoms. However, it was the theme of time in respect of these work-centred accounts of menopause that emerged repeatedly and significantly. As women spoke to feelings of juggling or balancing, and of negotiations or contestations, our thematic analysis identified three distinct temporal modalities in which

both retentive and protensive temporal forces furnished the conditions of possibility for menopausal experience at work. We label these temporal modalities *episodic*, *helical* and *relational*, using them to further explore how temporal forms of agency and embodied subjectivities play out for professional women.

Episodic time and menopausal subjectivities

Episodic time refers to the experience of calling upon one's lived body and locating that experience in different times (and spaces) or phases across the working life. For our participants, this episodic experience of time forged a variety of ways of being a menopausal professional woman. It brought into play a series of differences of degree, and of kind, and thus involved the interplay of retentive and protensive temporal forms of gendered agency. To start, episodic time most notably emerged through conflation of menopause with a particular 'time of life', and the continuities and changes, for good or ill, of a wider life course journey. As Sally (CenServ, Pro), for example, surmised: 'I wonder if that's just coincidence because we reach that (menopausal) time when it is, it is a time when a lot of things are going on and can happen'. For some women, menopause was unremarkable – part of a cartography of the many and often challenging demands and roles at this stage in their lives. According to Fay (SciEngMed, Aca):

Menopause just happens. Women don't think about it, they're busy. When you're in your late 40s that's when your career is going up, you don't think about menopause ... So it's a busy life with family as well and so it's not a time when you really spend a lot of time thinking about it.

For others, the experience of this time of life was significant and poignant, as they connected menopausal experience to a variety of personal (e.g. linked to their/others' health, children, caring responsibilities, relationship status, deaths in the family, mental health and ambitions) and professional (e.g. career goals, education and learning opportunities) signposts. Whether remarkable or not, this kaleidoscope of multiple dimensions resulted in many women suggesting that 'even though we all go through it, it's quite an individualised experience' (Marta, PA, 50–55).

Experiences of work and organization shaped this menopausal time of life. For instance, some interviewees drew on organizational conditions to distance their menopausal experience from a medicalized discourse, with its language of symptoms. Instead, they resituated it within a constellation of feelings, behaviours and perceptions associated with episodes and events in their professional lives. As Penny (ArtEdSS, Aca) notes in relation to her working life: 'you become a bit forgetful, but it's hard to tell if it's age or menopause'. Others talked about the difficulty of ascribing bodily experiences to menopause or simply the consequence of too much work because of their organizational position, especially if they had been in a particular role over a long time and had accumulated responsibilities. Explanations of menopausal experience thus bounced from the situated temporal body and back, fusing subjective understandings to the context of their professional lives. Time acts here in a retentive fashion by directing women to the past (Grosz, 2005), preserving these present moments in the past, and affording women the capacity to generate quantitative differences in their

lived experiences. That is to say, a situation where a host of events and episodes (including, or not, menopause) is cast into the past and could be judged as more, less, or similarly insignificant in shaping women's lives.

However, the episodic quality ascribed to time in this theme has another face, revealed by those women whose menopause was more pronounced or central to their organizational experience. In these cases, the embodied menopausal subject was a site of qualitative difference that operated with a protensive and anticipatory temporality, and as a force for differentiation within the female subject. To illustrate, experiencing the menopause as something that literally had to be 'worked through' enhanced certain women's self-knowledge and creative skills in navigating personal changes and continuities. This had implications for how those women managed certain tasks or requirements within a workplace setting. Enhanced self-knowledge manifested for Cassie (CenServ, Pro) through a positive experience of greater personal awareness and reflection that was associated with her menopause, and inseparable from her organizational practices. She said: 'Importantly ... menopause is actually quite a psychological step change in people's lives and I suspect that, you know, it's about mid-life. I don't call them crises, I just think it's a real review period.'

The idea of a 'review period' was echoed by Madeline (SciEngMed, Aca), who emphasized a sense of temporally situated independence and personal autonomy. In connecting her enjoyment to achieving an organizational position where she works without direct supervision, she recollected how:

We had a cat when I was young who had kittens and she'd patiently lie there as these things were hanging off her and you could just see her going, 'God, you know, I just want to get up and go for a walk'. I think there is that life stage, you know, where you can get up and go for a walk.

In the case of some participants, the experience of 'working through [the] complexities', as Babette (ArtEdSS, Aca) put it, gave rise to a new appreciation of the importance of the workplace as a potential counterpoint to gender-inscribed domestic trajectories they may have experienced in their lives. A process of professional realization could emerge, described by Babette as a kind of 'creativity [... and] resourcefulness and understanding how to take care of myself and not just going through the motions'. Menopausal changes were thus connected to the emergence of different possibilities that 'induce other developments and other trajectories' (Grosz, 1994: 191), such as career development, allied to a renewed focus on (her-)self, positive self-regard, or a time of greater energy and/or ambition in which the present dissipates into the future.

For some interviewees, it was an emerging appreciation of biorhythms as an important point of recognition in themselves that transformed the way they worked, and illustrates a biological form for these questions of becoming. Hannah (SciEngMed, Aca), for instance, described how she associated physical menstrual symptoms with increased work performance:

I get what I call pre-menstrual inspiration and there's a couple of days when my brain is on fire! And it's fantastic and if I can just line that up with grant writing. It doesn't happen when I'm

exhausted in semester but there are a couple of days when I can actually feel the brain goes on and it's a certain part of the cycle.

Hannah's experience echoes with Babette's above in so far as Babette viewed her creativity and resourcefulness as emerging from a constellation of skills and current bodily experiences.

For other women, the experience of menopause offered them an opportunity to articulate the potential advantages of identifying as a professional older woman. For example, some interviewees saw menopause as a time of life when they put (their) organization firmly 'in its place'. That is to say, it involved a re-assessment of the role they ascribed to work in their sense of self and happiness, of what matters whilst at work, and of how to respond to the sexist (and ageist) elements of the organization's gender order. For Diane (CenServ, Pro), she talked about her sense of liberation as being 'broader than just being free of periods'. Instead, she compared herself to an earlier, younger professional self: 'Not being such a pleasing young woman having to play that role. I see other young women doing it and I think ok it's a real trap. You get rewarded for it, but it's also a bit of a trap.'

In sum, the episodic temporal modality encompassed the conditions of possibility for varied forms of embodied subjectivity, configured around both differences of degree, and differences of kind, and with various implications for the menopausal subject. While episodic time may capture the subject through a conflation of menopause with the expectations and constraints presented by this 'time of life', the more prominent aspect of episodic menopausal subjectivities displayed here is that it gave greater opportunity for women to view themselves *for themselves* (not via the eyes or prescriptions of others) as an 'ageful' body. Furthermore, it exemplified a protensive orientation to time, in which an experimental sense of self – including a new working self – was in the making. Women's menopausal bodies became articulated in terms of potential and capacity when new and creative ways to be could spring forth.

Helical time and menopausal subjectivities

In this second theme, helical time configures questions of becoming through a distinct set of temporal concerns from that above. Helical time is imagined here as a kind of helix (hence helical) in which various temporal relations (organizational, cultural and individual biological) are experienced as coeval, turning back and revising subjectivity in the process. The modes of embodiment and gendered agency illustrated by this theme manifest both a retentive mode of subjectivity that 'settles' participants into the discursive conventions of gender norms, and a protensive, or 'unsettling' one, that enacts women's fear and ambivalence regarding the implications of menopause for their ongoing and future career.

For some participants, helical time subjected them to the force of gender norms and sexist/ageist attitudes, experienced in a closing down of their own subjectivity and via the preservational function of time. Here, the biorhythms of the menopausal body were portrayed as out of kilter with the temporal expectations of the organization, cleaving

apart individual and organizational time. For example, not being able to know when a hot flush would occur, or when major bleeding might happen (requiring very frequent changes of sanitary products), could be difficult to negotiate if women's working days involved back-to-back meetings or teaching activities scheduled months in advance. Hannah (SciEngMed, Aca) spoke of her long-distance travel for work, and the inconvenience of plane journeys when she was bleeding heavily where 'unanticipated bleeding and the sort of heavy flows where it cannot be contained' presented an acute problem for work. It was one of the reasons she went to the doctor about possible menopausal onset. Bridget (ArtEdSS, Pro) also reflected on the conundrum where menopausal symptoms were bound up with broader feelings of stress and anxiety that compromised her ability to feel fully present at work:

... even say you had a period for example that was so horrendously heavy that it made it impossible to do something, you could at least say, well for this particular time this is going to be an issue. But like with the hot flushes, you didn't know when they were coming, they just appeared and then disappeared and for whatever reason, and I think again mine might be tied into the anxiety.

Central to these concerns is remembering not only that the subject is the site of stasis and change in a discursive sense, but also that the body is vibrant matter constituted through stasis and change.

The stigma associated with unpredictable symptoms described above, and the lack of ability to control them according to organizational dictum, had behavioural effects. A sedimentary and disciplined mode of gendered agency resulted in some women changing their workplace practices, including avoiding meetings or environments they could not bear. Some participants situated such experiences within a broader menstrual biography of their organizational lives where menopause was one modulated chapter in a series of negating experiences. Diana (CenServ, Pro) encapsulates it as follows:

Menopausal women would they be punished for outing themselves, would they now be identified as crones ... So you know, so we're too young and stupid and sex objectish, and then we're too pregnant and maternal and worried with child caring duties. And then we become dried up crones [laughs] who, you know, can't contribute to the workforce, whereas to me it's like leading a troop in war.

Others reported that menopause was disturbing or disconcerting in terms of new bodily experiences or emotions, and was exacerbated by feeling exposed or hypervisible as an older woman worker. Participants referred to a lack of 'presence' (which may not correlate with actual numbers) of older women around them. This perspective worked alongside expectations that retirement or not working were the ultimate destinations for older women – a view that many of the participants themselves had also assumed. Many talked more precisely about menopause in terms of the invisibility of older women in their workplace. Kirsty (ArtEdSS, Aca), for instance, told us that although she thought 'it should be a time of recognition of a different age of a woman, it's more a disappearing of women; generally, menopausal women are invisible'. Maria (ArtEdSS, Aca) makes

the further point that menopause is 'very invisible compared to, perhaps, if you were child rearing or having babies'.

The organizational act of 'giving' time was vital when considering the biorhythmic forces of menopause. This is especially so in light of the immediacy of the demands of certain features of an organization's physical environment (such as centralized air conditioning) when experiencing bothersome and erratic hot flushes. Some of our participants told us how their hot flushes were associated with a loss of self-control and efficacy at work, as well as a source of shame and embarrassment. For Hannah (SciEngMed, Aca):

I didn't want to get to the point where I was bringing two changes of clothes, because I was getting not too far off that for long days ... Smelly is probably the thing that worries me most followed by unanticipated bleeding.

The ease of accessibility to means of temperature control (like desk fans) through formalized channels signalled to participants that there was a community of women across the organization sharing a similar experience. However, the manner in which the organization responded to requests for assistance with regard to temperature control also made a difference, as manifest in Katie's (SciEngMed, Aca) account: 'If you ask for an air conditioner or a cooler office people think you're whinging rather than an acknowledgement that you know for women in menopausal period'. These seemingly small organizational gestures in terms of practical solutions were important in affirming women's sense of belonging to their organizations, or isolating or ignoring their experiences, which in turn could exacerbate physical menopausal symptoms.

Surprised at finding themselves here, 'in menopause', forging new and unexpected organizational identities was a thoroughly ambivalent experience for several women. Some participants spoke of a confusion or disorientation, and questioned where and how they belonged organizationally or professionally. This sentiment was often heightened by the perceived dangers of vocalizing these fears or physical experiences, and subsequently having their competence questioned, as alluded to by Louise (SciEngMed, Aca):

There is a sense of potency and potential around the idea of being able to procreate and I think that the most creative research ideas or many of my achievements have been through this fertile phase of my life. It's been like intellectually fertile as well and I think there is a kind of a strange feeling that perhaps that, you know, there is a correlation between biological fertility and the ability to impact on the world as well.

The weaving together of multiple temporal axes articulated through this helical modality illuminate time as a paradoxical site of preservation and differentiation in menopausal subject formation, and is indicative of what McNay (2000: 17) terms a 'contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous'. Different times, different pasts and different presents across different domains coalesce, sometimes to produce subjection, and sometimes producing a potential for refashioning the self that may or may not be realized organizationally. Some women felt empowered to go 'into the unknown' and carve out new ways of being at work that reorientated their previous sense of selves. These accounts demonstrate the dissipated force of the present to produce a 'future that differs from it' (Grosz,

2005: 4) and thereby create embodied and subjective change. Janet's (SciEngMed, Aca) view is indicative: 'There was a little bit of apprehension going in because you're going into the unknown and of course you have no warning, it just happens and then coming out the other end going, mmm, okay, that wasn't so bad.'

In such cases, there was an interesting undercurrent that the organization was 'behind' in terms of responding to where the women wanted to be in terms of their careers (and their bodies). Many were ready for change.

Relational time and menopausal subjectivities

Relational time speaks to temporal subjectification specifically associated with sexual difference. For our participants, it was clear that menopause involved a set of changing relations: between women and the organization; and between women and other women or men. Specifically, it appeared that through the temporal co-evolution of biology and culture in an organizational setting, a different potential self is opened up that may transform her relationship to the Other, as well as the very parameters of whom/what constitutes that Other.

Cohort connections provided opportunities for participants to articulate a continuity of womanhood across the organization, which served to forge and imagine new and/or empathic connections with other women. This was not so much a case of participants 'comparing-and-contrasting' their respective physical timeline of symptoms with other working women. Rather, many interviewees spoke about the importance of challenging the silence of menopause in organizations to 'make it easier for the next lot' (Babette, ArtEdSS, Aca). At the same time, their own experiences of menopause at work were constructed as being easier to talk about, and thus more generously received than those of previous generations. There was a consensus that work had transformed menopause for the 'baby boomer' generation. Jennifer (ArtEdSS, Pro) described how:

My generation, and generations after, talk about it more. My mother didn't talk about it with me. It wasn't spoken about probably but, you know, I just say 'oh yeah I'm sorry I know I'm really grumpy at the moment, I'm really tetchy'.

The social context of work was thus important for the experience of menopausal symptoms, revealing enduring and shifting lines of sexual difference. That is to say, while there is a continuity here that amplifies the difference of women's sexual specificity, it also transforms the self and her connection to other women. This can be seen in quite literal ways in participants' changing relations and perceptions of other women, demonstrating qualitative differences of kind between past and future ways of knowing and understanding female Others. For example, Katie (SciEngMed, Aca) talked about how she retrospectively reframed a colleague's behaviour at work, after having gone through menopause herself. She said:

I remember when I first started in the university and there was a woman who was suffering really badly, she used to sort of crack in meetings and, you know, go off her head and do all of

that stuff. I was probably about 30 or a little bit older and I remember thinking oh my God her behaviour is appalling. But it was interesting when I hit that period myself I thought ah! She would have been in exactly that period when she was behaving in those ways.

Although Katie's ascription of menopause to her colleague may be unsubstantiated, the later encoding of her colleague's behaviour suggests a relationality that tends towards acceptance rather than judgement. The above said, the possibility of a newly forged sense of womanhood through menopause was shaped by the cultural and professional working contexts of the women, including their faculty or discipline area. Here, we turn to the organization as an 'Other' in the women's lives.

Whereas both academic and professional staff within arts, education or social science were more likely to recall speaking about menopausal issues as a group, those within science, engineering or medicine discussed the more implicit messages that passed between women. Stephanie's and Madeline's accounts are emblematic of this disciplinary divide:

Health issues do come up in our conversation [with colleagues] but only between, certainly the women of my generation because we've known each other for such a long time and we have so many commonalities in terms of, you know, the shorthand conversation you can have which starts with mother, work, through children, and then gets onto hot flushes and somewhere in there it will possibly be mentioned. (Stephanie, ArtEdSS, Aca)

You wouldn't ever see somebody going 'oh I'm having a hot flush' and, you know, at a college council meeting or, you know, a university course management meeting. That just would not happen, so I think it's women's business. (Madeline, SciEngMed, Aca)

These accounts speak to women's ways of dealing with sexist and ageist attitudes towards (older) women's bodies in organizations, and the fear that a hot flush might pollute the working environment with a reminder of the leakiness of women's bodies. That said, the organizational silence surrounding menopause was not always viewed as negating by participants; it may also act as an important affective bond with other women in the organization. This bond is temporal in nature; a temporal unity in which a stretching back to prior relations with 'significant' others (mothers, work colleagues, supervisors, the organization) and forward to future ones (through the category of womanhood, or a caring employer encoded in specific material objects) are coterminous.

For example, many referred to 'women's business' or 'women's talk', where the meaning of behaviours such as taking off layers of clothing in a room, or having a fan on one's desk, were unspoken but understood by women 'in the know' – that is to say, by those women whose awareness had been raised by their own lived experience of menopausal transition. These relationships amongst women could be viewed as a recognition of sexual specificity, and of its profound role in their women's menopausal experience. Such a menopause-related realization recasts the lines of sexual difference as it sediments for women the idea that as individuals they are sexually different (Grosz, 2004). But for other women, it also transforms the line of sexual difference that takes them towards other women in new and unfolding ways.

Such affective connections (and how to use the knowledge associated within them) were also manifest in participants' reflections concerning the practicalities of how to lead a sustainable working life as an older woman for the next 15–20 years, and organizational support to that end. Although 'management' of the menopause through formal policies was seen as either non-existent in organizations or not seen as translating into positive behaviours, a few women told of experiences where an ethos of care in respect of menopausal employees did translate into practice, mainly through supervisor or line manager intervention. In one instance, Lisa (CenServ, Pro) lost her husband, was diagnosed with cancer and told by the doctor she was going into menopause, all in the space of six months. She told us how her manager gave her a no-time-defined break during this period, and a number of choices regarding where she could work upon her return. The 'absolutely wonderful' experience left open the possibility to return to work in the future (and be a worker in the future by maintaining employment) in a range of ways that did not have to be defined in that moment.

The sentiment of going unscripted was often part of a broader story of the menopausal body, in the sense that the ambiguity of menopause provided an experiential site for the unknown. This realization subsequently traversed into other spaces and helped some women to explore a variety of possibilities for their later lives. This was most pronounced for those who were now breaking the linearity of traditional career trajectories. Valerie (SciEngMed, Aca) talked about the way she thinks about the idea of a planned or projected career now, having moved diagonally and sideways into a Deputy Dean role. She stated: 'when I got there I still didn't know how'. Another participant talked about a new career as a marriage celebrant alongside her work in the university. Yet rather than playing by the gendered and age-inflected informal rules of linear career progression, women sought to assert themselves in their own terms as organizational members. Winnie (ArtEdSS, Pro) suggests that:

In the sense that menopause is tied up with ageing and reproduction and youthfulness, we challenge those ideas here anyway so there's a consciousness of saying well there's more to a woman than this or this or this or this.

Others suggested that their modulated orientations to work had brought a different sense of calm or space to concentrate on different things, but borne out of frustration:

It's a sense of I can't be fucked pleasing people any more. I'm too tired. I don't have the energy and I really, I just want to focus on the important things and that feels liberating too. (Diana, ArtEdSS, Pro)

Now I can separate myself from my work, it's not my identity now, so before it felt like if I was good at work then I was a good person that I'd be loved that the world would be alright. (Babette, ArtEdSS, Aca)

Seemingly prompted by a heightened sense, sometimes of empathy, sometimes of annoyance or anger vis-a-vis self-other relations connected to menopause, the participants shaped a revised and renewed sense of self on the basis of changing relations to these Others. Some women were able to carve out new spaces within their current organization,

which the organization itself may not have been able to envisage or plan for. But these (surprising) protensive Other-oriented temporal relations do sit alongside the retentive ones noted earlier, where women's sexual specificity was reproduced in relation to menopause and kept them 'in their place'.

Concluding discussion

In order to address the underexplored connections between embodiment and time in feminist organizational research, this article posed the research question: 'How does time matter for women's embodied and subjective experiences of menopause at work?' In reflecting on our findings, we suggest that time (as encapsulated in the three temporal modalities) matters for two interconnected reasons that provide our contributions to feminist studies of organizational embodiment and subjectivity.

First, the temporal modalities matter because they present distinct conditions of possibility for gendered agency in organizational settings associated with retentive and protensive 'temporal forces'. Organizational subjectivities can be considered ontological projects which are both constituted through time (not just located or experienced in time), and constitute time, as a combination of sedimental and future-oriented temporalities. The temporality of the self as conceived in terms of duration is ontologically possible because of its unpredictable continuity and the simultaneous preservation (retention) and dissipation (protension) of the menopausal subject into an unknowable future. Whereas ageful identities are often constituted or caricatured through a reference to continuity, our study suggests ageing can also be characterized by divergence and elaboration, where 'the future springs from the past not via inevitability, but through elaboration and invention' (Grosz, 2004: 157). When women experience transitional bodily episodes such as menopause, lived time can dilate, stretch, split or (re-)stitch (differently) the strands of her temporal tapestry of life with yet-to-be-known implications, or demand an emergent or experimental scripting of whom she is or can be for the next 10–20 years of her working life. These insights highlight the value of McNay's work in organizational accounts of gendered agency. For one, they demonstrate a variety of forms of gendered agency (and their temporal underpinnings) that give novel content to McNay's generative paradigm. Yet it is important to emphasize that they demonstrate the ambivalent manner in which forms of agency associated with both the sedimented and generative paradigms may be experienced by working women in the course of their lives. In particular, the instances of subjection for our participants were sometimes experienced as comfortable, or as positive (not just negative, as is often assumed with disciplinary power), whereas those generative modes associated with surprise, creativity or difference were not always affirming.

Second, time matters to accounts of organizational embodiment and subjectivity because of the political and ethical implications of the disruptive temporality associated with generative forms of gendered agency. Our findings flesh out Grosz's philosophical treatise of time as a force that 'motivates and informs ... [the universe's] most intimate living details' (Grosz, 2005: 1), by suggesting that it is experienced in far more immediate, localized and contextually specific ways than Grosz accounts for in her evolutionary-informed thesis. In particular, a body politics of surprise emphasizes the productive

and temporal forces found in the intimate and contextually situated lives of working women. Significantly, our participants' experiences suggest that a body politics of surprise finds its momentum in a feminine relationality: within women themselves as indexed in time, between close confidantes or colleagues, or even 'Women' as a community or organizational cohort.

These aspects as encapsulated in the notion of a body politics of surprise have wide-ranging implications for organizational bodies that are often sidelined. On one level, both menopausal bodies and menopausal subjectivities can be considered disruptive or subversive – the former on account of their 'misbehaviour' (e.g. their leakiness), and the latter through the manner in which they challenge and breach ageist stereotypes and sexist gender norms associated with the older female body. Some participants felt full of health and well-being, had energy, were on an upward career trajectory, wanted to grow and develop, and were ambitious and waiting for the organization to catch up with them. Others wanted to tell their organizations to 'fuck off' (either by leaving it, or by speaking up, or even simply by being there). These are certainly not the deficient, passive, frail or overdetermined bodies of dominant menopausal discourse or the disparaging representations of the older female body/worker. Menopausal women can be capable women, wise, experienced, and relationally oriented by virtue of (rather than despite) their situated identities – leaders for tomorrow, not employees from the past. More generally, the study demonstrates that plotting feminist activity in the dynamic lives of older working women is an exciting project because the potential for action, assertion and experimentation of feminist subjectivities is central to the power and potential of ageful bodies.

A body politics of surprise is more than the sum of protensive and retentive conditions of possibility. It also asserts sexual difference and re-affirms the sexual specificity of the female body, and is in this respect important for organizational research. From one perspective, the sexual specificity of the menopausal body could be considered subversive in organizational terms through its independence – it cannot be 'filled' with a child through a man, and thus breaks with the patriarchal and heteronormative fiat that often belies feminized organizational identities. It is also subversive in challenging the manifold modes of expulsion of the lived/fleshy body from the workplace and the folly of desexualized organizational structures and theory (Acker, 1990). Menopausal embodiment is, in these respects, an ethical relation to others that 'enables a more engaged, compassionate, resistant and pluralistic ethics that counters strong organizational tendencies towards control, homogeneity, discrimination, and domination' (Pullen and Rhodes, 2015: 162).

From another and related perspective, in being linked to the multiplicity of temporal forces and forms of disruption, the sexual specificity of the menopausal body breaks the linear contours of masculinist time that undergird organizational life (Knights and Odih, 1995). The menopausal body is not a body that 'has been', marked as 'past it' on a linear career trajectory; it is always in becoming, with an eye to the future, but with unpredictable and undefinable outcomes. In this respect, we concur with Grosz's view that a feminist politics of surprise informed by Bergson cannot be a feminist project for change that has a future mapped out in advance, with clear goals, outcomes, and ways of getting there (e.g. in an organizational context, by only setting menopause-related policies and practices to manage the menopausal body). This would contradict the very (temporal) nature of the menopausal body, and the ageing body more generally. Instead, we call for

further attention to be given to a feminist politics of experimentation, reflective of the 'unfinished and unstable elements of corporeal existence' (McNay, 2000: 32), rather than a programmatic and normative feminist politics. Perhaps it is in this body politics of surprise that menopausal embodiment and subjectivity carries its most distinctive potential for future feminist organizational research.

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