

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## Intersectionality at work: The case of Ruth Bates Harris and NASA

### Journal Item

How to cite:

Ruel, Stefanie; Mills, Albert J. and Thomas, Janice L. (2018). Intersectionality at work: The case of Ruth Bates Harris and NASA. *Ephemera: theory & politics in organizations*, 18(1) pp. 17–49.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2018 Stefanie Ruel; 2018 Albert J. Mills; 2018 Janice L. Thomas



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/intersectionality-work-case-ruth-bates-harris-and-nasa>

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](http://oro.open.ac.uk)



## Intersectionality at work: The case of Ruth Bates Harris and NASA\*

Stefanie Ruel, Albert J. Mills and Janice L. Thomas

### abstract

One challenge we face as diversity and gender scholars is how to apply intersectionality in organizational studies. We present one possible application of intersectionality to demonstrate that it can be put to work beyond the bounds of theorization alone. To achieve this goal, we focused on the organizational experiences of Ruth Bates Harris, the first woman and the first African American hired to a senior management position at the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration (U.S. NASA). We recreated Bates Harris retrospectively, via a plausible story, by applying the critical sensemaking (CSM) framework. We then analyzed this story by applying once again the CSM framework with a focus on: (1) intersecting identity (micro) (re)constructions; (2) the rules surrounding NASA occupational roles, vague professional practices, and financial resources, and the influence of these rules on identity reconstructions; and, (3) two dominant social values in the Cold War-Civil Rights era, and their relationship to the marginalization of an individual. The analysis of the plausible story, resulting in the recreation of a complex individual via her range of anchor points and the influence of NASA's rules, meta-rules and social values on her identities, contributes to our understanding of how to put intersectionality to work.

---

\* The authors wish to thank the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Archivists John Dojka, Jenifer Monger, and Tammy Gobert for their tireless support and enthusiasm for this research.

This research was supported by the Athabasca University's Graduate Student Disciplinary Research Fund.

## Introduction

The application of intersectionality is not an easy notion to consider. Intersectionality can be defined along identity<sup>1</sup> categories such as race<sup>2</sup>, gender<sup>3</sup>, ethnicity, etc., that are interdependent and that constitute each other (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). This intersection of identity categories can position individuals in society, creating an order. Intersectionality scholarship provides a powerful framework for studying how individuals are ‘invariably multiply positioned through differences in gender, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national belonging and more’ (Davis, 2014: 17). How we apply these ideas within an empirical study remains a major issue however. Many have attempted to put intersectionality to work; some have been successful, while others have struggled to address the dual notions of intersecting identity categories and the attendant outcome of an order. We undertook this study to contribute to the strategic application of this intersectionality heuristic, to put intersectionality to work beyond the theoretical debates that have governed much of the literature (Hearn and Louvrier, 2015; Mercer et al., 2015). The research question that drove this strategic application was: how does an individual, who is discursively created and reproduced, come to be marginalized in the workplace? Our research objective was to demonstrate that intersectionality can be put to work with respect to reconstructing and representing an individual’s lived social reality.

To achieve this research objective, we reconstructed the Glenn (2004) anchor points concept. Anchor points are intersecting identity categories that are discursively created and recreated. An anchor point secures meaning, for a brief, fleeting period of time, so that we may consider the order that is fashioned through this meaning. An anchor point mirrors Ibarra’s ‘provisional selves’ (1999: 765), where an individual may present themselves, or be created by others, as one self,

---

<sup>1</sup> Identity, from a sociological perspective, is an amalgam of self-identity and social-identity. Self-identity is our own sense of self (Watson, 2008). Social-identity consists of inputs into our own self-identity (*ibid.*). These inputs are socially constructed and manifested in discourses via interactions with others. When we refer to identity in this paper, we are referring to social-identity specifically.

<sup>2</sup> To recognize the socio-political characterizations of individuals (Weeks, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991; Acker, 2006), we capitalized the terms ‘White’ and ‘Black’ – where African American is used interchangeably with Black - to reflect ‘cultural allegiances’, (Ladson-Billings, 1998: 9). In direct quotes from this study’s protagonists, however, their own discursive uses reflect the source; so ‘*black*’, ‘*colored*’, ‘*female*’ may appear, and are italicized as shown here.

<sup>3</sup> The terms ‘woman’ and ‘man’ are used to encompass the cultural, gendered-experience that is attributable to these social positions.

and then move to another self (re)creation. An individual<sup>4</sup> clearly does not live in a vacuum, and so identity anchor points must be put in context. Context in this study was built from the workplace, not as a stable structure, but via changing organizational rules and meta-rules, and social values that can influence discourses and discursive practices. Finally, discourse is a concept constructed as sets of statements and practices that bring an individual, an object, or set of objects into being (Parker, 1992).

Drawing on postmodern archival research (Mills and Helms Mills, 2018), we studied the case of Ruth Bates Harris within the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration (U.S. NASA). We traced her experience, as the first African American and the first woman hired as a senior manager, within the early 1970's NASA. The discursive processes that (re)created Bates Harris, from her arrival within the NASA Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) office in 1971, her dismissal in 1973, and her return to NASA in 1974, were compelling. Analysis of these discourses involved the critical sensemaking (CSM) framework by Helms Mills et al. (2010). The heuristic of CSM is comprised of a study of discourses (Foucault, 1980), of organizational rules (Mills and Murgatroyd, 1991), and of formative contexts or social values (Unger, 1987a; 1987b). We used CSM to first construct a plausible story of Ruth Bates Harris. Then we applied CSM, as an analytical framework, to this story. CSM provided us then with an avenue to focus on an organizational reality, and its impact on the (re)creation of an individual.

We begin this paper by presenting the application of intersectionality via anchor points. We follow this theoretical framework with our chosen methodology for this study. We then submit our plausible story of Ruth Bates Harris, and the results of our analysis of this story. We ask and answer the ever important 'so what?' question, framing our answers with an eye to what our contribution consists of with respect to the application of intersectionality.

### **Application of intersectionality via anchor points**

As the editors of this special issue presented, Crenshaw (1989; 1991) introduced intersectionality as a lens built on the varied identity, and intersecting systems of power research (Collins, 2009). Crenshaw applied intersectionality to examine specifically the interaction of race and gender, and the resultant exclusion of Black women within the judiciary. There were also important influences to

---

<sup>4</sup> The notion of an individual is influenced by Foucault's technology of self where the 'subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or in a more autonomous way, through practices of liberation, of liberty...on the basis, of course, of a number of rules, styles, inventions to be found in the cultural environment' (Foucault, 1988: 50-51).

intersectionality scholarship from critical race studies (The Combahee River Collective, 1979; hooks, 1981; Hull et al., 1982; King, 1988) where the Black Woman was inserted as a theoretical wedge into traditional White feminist work (Nash, 2008). Crenshaw's important legislative work, and the theoretical work of others in this field (for e.g. Staunæs, 2003; Glenn, 2004; Lykke, 2005; McCall, 2005; Collins, 2009; Cho et al., 2013; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 2015), led to a suite of empirical qualitative and quantitative studies on intersectionality in such areas as: feminist and postfeminist studies within the workplace (Coleman and Rippin, 2000; Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Meyerson and Kolb, 2000; Torres, 2012); studies of men (Hearn, 2014); ethics (Van Herk et al., 2011); educational studies (Naples, 2009); transnational/postcolonial studies (Mohanty, 1988; Calás et al., 2013); and, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender studies (Stone, 2006; Bowleg, 2008). The challenges that some of these intersectionality scholars (such as McCall, 2005; Bowleg, 2008) encountered with respect to the application of intersectionality led us to consider how we could apply intersectionality in such a way to increase its usability within organizational studies.

Glenn's (2004) original work surrounding anchor points offered us one possible avenue to address this usability challenge. Anchor points are intersecting identity categories, that are discursively created and recreated. Anchor points also encompass the act of their creation, via power-relations among individuals, and these individuals' own sensemaking processes. Power-relations, used here in the Foucauldian sense, exist locally in day-to-day interactions, are continuous, productive and are 'capillary' (Fraser, 1989: 22). Power-relations circulate throughout the entire social body, down to the smallest practice. Power-relations cannot be possessed but they can be deployed in discourses; thus, they can be disciplinary in nature, creating order and establishing boundaries (Talbot, 2010). Sensemaking, on the other hand, works hand-in-hand with power-relations, 'unfold(ing) as a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage [in] ongoing circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively, while enacting more or less order into those ongoing circumstances', (Weick et al., 2005: 409).

Glenn's (2004) anchor points concept were also built on binary narratives of White versus the Other, and on discourses of 'denial, accusation and confession' (Friedman, 1995: 7). She specifically captured these 'accusations and confessions' within her understanding of the concept of relationality. The relationality concept can be constructed by women and men, of varying ethnic and racial backgrounds (Friedman, 1995), with the goal of looking at relationships between different phenomena. Relationality considers '...identity as situationally [*sic*] constructed and defined and at the crossroads of different systems of alterity and stratification' (Friedman, 1995: 17). Collins and Bilge (2016), however, stressed that the idea

behind relationality is to remove the 'either/or' binary of studying individuals. In other words, we are urged to move away from men versus women, White versus Black, poor versus rich characterizations of a social order. This is done in such a way to move towards a study of interconnections (Collins and Bilge, 2016). Relationality is also, importantly, dependent on power-relations, in the day-to-day interactions among individuals, and can reflect both productive and disciplinary interconnections.

The anchor point concept was based on a construction of relationality whereby Glenn saw Black and woman as identities gaining meaning in relation to each other. This meaning was nebulous, depending on the power-relations that were at play. She also constructed the anchor point as being in hierarchal opposition: so White was the dominant category over Black, and Man was genderless in relation to Woman. Furthermore, her use of relationality included the bond of occupational identities that an individual may take on, such as housekeeper responsibilities. Creating an anchor point – a Black housekeeper woman – according to Glenn then secured meaning in such a way that we can consider the order that is (re)created through this meaning. Ultimately, the study of anchor points allowed Glenn to study the detrimental consequences of the lived experience of the Other.

This definition of anchor points, we contend, ignores the complexities of power-relations and of discourses. Glenn broke down interrelations among individuals to whether someone was White or someone was Black, whether someone was a Woman or a Man. This implied an additive nature to identity relationships, which ignored the fundamental idea behind intersectionality; namely, the very complexity of our intersecting identity categories, how they are interdependent, and how they constitute each other. By embracing Glenn's treatment of relationality, we would be perpetuating the idea that one single identity category added to another was responsible for the ordering among individuals. If the anchor points concept was to realize its potential, reflecting a complex individual and their lived, ordered experience, this concept had to be reconstructed based on the very complexity of individuals, embracing intersectionality, and the context they find themselves in.

### *Reconstructing anchor points*

We chose to rebuild the concept of anchor points based on discourses and power-relations found in rules, meta-rules, and social values. Rules, meta-rules, and social values mirror the complexities of a lived experience, moving away from the binary representations that Glenn captured in her interpretation of relationality. Specifically, rules and meta-rules function as a pre-existing framework determining how things get done (Mills and Murgatroyd, 1991). Social values,

similarly, limit and set boundaries on how individuals imagine what can be, and what can be done, within that social reality (Unger, 1987a, 1987b). Dominant social values paired with rules and meta-rules can be represented in symbols, metaphors, and narratives within institutionalized practices (Hartt et al, 2012).

Returning to the intersectionality, this heuristic includes the notion of boundaries and of limits. Specifically, the discursive reproduction of intersecting identities, and the sensemaking surrounding this reproduction, can result in the temporary movement to the periphery of an individual. For example, Monture (1986) provided a powerful story of her movement to the periphery within a conference setting which has its own rules and social values. This individual became the Other within that specific context. This movement can be referred to as marginalization, where there was 'deficiency in the...political, and social resources used to guarantee access to the rights and privileges assumed by dominant group members' (Cohen, 1999: 37-38). Intersecting identity categories along with discourses, power-relations, and sensemaking processes all captured within the reworked anchor points concept, can then be used 'in tracing how certain people seem to get positioned as not only different but also troublesome and, in some instances, marginalized' (Staunæs, 2003: 101). The act of ordering is then created/recreated via the discursive production of the anchor point, and the sensemaking of both the creator and the recipient of the anchor point.

Anchor points, as we reconstructed them, are discursively created and recreated identities. They include power-relations among individuals, and these individuals' own sensemaking processes. Anchor points secure meaning, for a brief period of time, within and influenced by a context represented by rules, meta-rules, and social values. The deployment of these anchor points, via discourses and the capillary nature of power-relations, can produce and impose limits that (re)create an order. For example, someone may identify a Black woman who is dependent financially on her partner as one possible anchor point. This anchor point highlights the intersection of race, gender, and socio-economic status as a class. This same person for whom someone has discursively created this anchor point – a financially-dependent Black woman – represents Crenshaw's (1991) empirical findings whereby this individual is treated differently within a legislative context. This being said, this same individual can have other anchor points such as a working mother, influenced by the context, discourses and power-relations at play. This possible range of anchor points is represented in Figure 1.

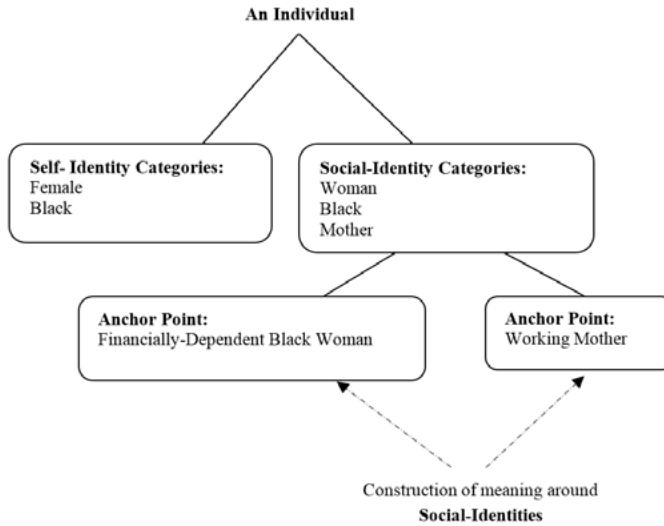


Figure 1: Anchor Points Example

## Methodology

We recognized that to bring into evidence this intersectionality theoretical framework, centered on anchor points, the methodology would need to support this initiative rather than hinder it. The chosen methodology would also have an important relationship with the nature of the data set collected. To elaborate on this point, we begin this section with a presentation of the archival data set. We follow this with a presentation of Helms Mills et al.’s (2010) CSM framework, which provided us with the appropriate ontological and epistemological support to analyze the data collected. We close this methodological section with how we applied this CSM heuristic first to create the Ruth Bates Harris plausible story, and then, second, to analyze this story.

### *Nature of the data set*

The data set was built via an iterative process, based on one of the authors’ past research experience with the early 1970’s U.S. Congressional and Senate hearing transcripts. By reviewing these various transcripts, which were hundreds of pages long and that reflected the interests of a number of groups and of independent parties, the multi-voiced narratives were narrowed down to what we considered to be key U.S. NASA senior management actors. In this way, we were able to gather key discursive artifacts, and to define a time span that would engage, as opposed to overwhelm, the reader into the discovery of Ruth Bates Harris. U.S. NASA’s Deputy Administrator George M. Low’s (Low, 1970) extensive archival records,



including a document and photographic collection of one-hundred and seventy-two boxes, housed at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI), were added to this data set. Numerous discussions with the extremely helpful, and competent, RPI archival staff facilitated the first author to gain a better understanding of the nature and the organization of the archival records that RPI housed. Following this experience at RPI, the data set grew to include various news media reports from the time period in question. These news media reports were available online, via an extensive U.S. database of local and national media outlets. The data set was deemed complete with the exciting discovery of an autographed copy of Bates Harris' (1991) autobiography.

Throughout this process of collecting data, methodological standards were applied to ensure soundness, traceability, and evidentiary value in line with Mills and Helms Mills (2018) postmodern archival research guidelines. Specifically, a field research diary and a running database of known, and unknown, RPI box contents were maintained by the first author while at RPI. Subsequently, photocopies and notes (i.e. on the photocopies, emails, etc.) were maintained in hard copy format in a series of four binders. Finally, extensive communication among the authors was enacted throughout this research initiative.

### *Critical sensemaking framework*

The CSM framework (Helms Mills et al., 2010) guided our analysis by helping us to focus on four heuristics that are intertwined. This framework is specifically shaped from the interaction of Weick's (1995) sensemaking, Foucault's (1978; 1980) discourses, Mills and Murgatroyd's (1991) context of organizational rules, and Unger's (1987a; 1987b) formative contexts. CSM goes in a different direction from Weickian sensemaking, where the four heuristics working together create an analysis framework for how people come to understand 'things', 'objects', etc. Furthermore, the interaction of these heuristics is the key idea here; there is no structural, or procedural, step-function among sensemaking, discourses, rules and meta-rules, and formative contexts.

Weickian sensemaking (1995), previously defined in the application of intersectionality, and its seven properties, namely identity construction, retrospective, relying on extracted cues, plausibility, enactment of the environment, the social interaction with others, and that it is ongoing, are all important considerations in the experiences of an individual within an organization. Weick's (1993) analysis of the stories surrounding firefighters that would not/could not drop their tools, as they were an integral part of these men's identities, led to important avenues of understanding in meaning making and the importance of identity. The analysis work in this study is not however based on

Weickian sensemaking alone, but on critical sensemaking. Where Weickian sensemaking ‘starts’ out at a shock or crisis event, the heuristic of critical sensemaking does not need this shock to be able to study an organization (Helms Mills et al., 2010). This critical sensemaking, an analytical method that embraces power-relations and context, ‘looks at actions and beliefs as driven by plausibility not accuracy’ (Helms Mills et al., 2010: 189). Furthermore, critical sensemaking embraces Foucauldian discourses, and its influence on Weickian sensemaking.

With respect to these Foucauldian discourses, they and their processes are a way to bring an object into being. They also offer a way of structuring the social world into a useable and manageable pattern where we can make sense of events. Foucauldian discourse is related to mundane social life<sup>5</sup>, and to social knowledge creation and recreation. Social life and social knowledge includes historical genealogies, as Foucault showed in his numerous works (e.g. Foucault, 1977; 2001). Social realities, viewed via interactions among individuals, cannot be understood without investigating those discourses that are present in that reality (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). Discursive processes similarly encompass ‘everyday attitudes and behavior, along with our perceptions of what we believe to be reality’ (Grant et al., 1998: 2). Discursive processes centered on identity, anchor points in our case, are made available to us as social constructions that impart knowledge. These processes ultimately constrain the sensemaker within a social reality ‘to seek out familiar solutions that have worked in the past...and [that] maintain the social status quo’ (Helms Mills and Mills, 2009: 175).

Discourses can also reproduce and reflect rules, meta-rules and formative contexts, providing a sense of order for individuals within a particular social reality. Just as sensemaking and discourses work together, so too Mills and Murgatroyd’s (1991) institutional rules and meta-rules work in concert with Unger’s (1987a; 1987b) formative contexts. Meta-rules are defined as system-wide rules such as globalization, economic systems, employment equity legislation within Canada or Affirmative Action legislation in the U.S. Demographics, an exercise in statistical structuring of individuals into groups of information, is another example of a meta-rule. Meta-rules are broad in scope and in application, and can ‘represent points of intersection between numbers of formative contexts’ (Helms Mills et al., 2010: 190).

With respect to organizational rules, Mills and Murgatroyd (1991) highlighted that organizational rules function as a pre-existing framework determining how ‘things get done’. This state of pre-existence does not imply that these rules are not

---

<sup>5</sup> Social life refers to the ‘interconnected networks of social practices of diverse sorts (economic, political, cultural, family and so on)’ (Fairclough, 2001: 27).

influenced by the agency of individuals; the issue is not that we are trying to identify rules creation, but that they exist and that we can 'see' them, and study their influence on the everyday activities of individuals. Rules are social constructions (Mills and Murgatroyd, 1991), and impose orderings in the power-regime that are organizations. Organizational rules may limit how individuals within an organization act thus constraining them in their mundane, daily existence within the organization.

Formative contexts reflect dominant assumptions captured within the idea of social values (Unger, 1987b). They bring together dominant social values with individual action (Helms Mills et al., 2010). Dominant assumptions, for example, in these social values can be produced, reproduced, and reflected in discourses. These formative contexts can limit and set boundaries on how individuals as sensemakers imagine what can be, and what can be done, within a social reality. In this process of imagining the possible, the power-relations that are at work among individuals, and the power-effects, can be examined via discursive processes. Specifically, individuals within an organization can express institutionally dominant social values through narratives and stories. These organizational narratives can capture the said and the unsaid. These organizational narratives are not necessarily presented in a constant stream of information but rather, can be characterized as interrupted evidence. The evidence ultimately must be constituted back together by the interpreter to be able to study this uncoordinated cluster of power-relations (Flyvbjerg, 2012). The interpreter's responsibility is to tease out the underlying assumptions presented in these discourses. The challenge then becomes to analyze not only the narratives and stories themselves but to also look at what the discourses protect (*ibid.*).

The beauty of the CSM framework is its focus on discourses. Social realities cannot be understood without investigating discourses that are practiced, and that influence other discourses in that reality (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). Discourses centred on an individual's identities reflect power-relations that flow through the social. They also give meaning to social life. Specifically, these identity discursive acts, working in tandem with sensemaking, constrain the individual 'to seek out familiar solutions that have worked in the past...and [that] maintain the social status quo' (Helms Mills and Mills, 2009: 175). These familiar solutions are influenced, in part, by institutional rules and meta-rules, and formative contexts. CSM therefore provides a framework to study discourses, weaving in an individual's sensemaking, institutional rules and meta-rules, and formative contexts all together.

Empirical research using the CSM framework includes an interesting diversity of applications. Thurlow's (2007) study of discourses at a community college found

that individuals' made sense of organizational change via many interconnected avenues, including the centrality of identity. Carroll et al.'s (2008) study of call centres, and their managers and employees, applied CSM to privilege plausible understanding of management relationships, power, and resistance. Hartt et al.'s (2012) dual ANTi-History and CSM framework, applied to archival materials, found that history is socially constructed storytelling with respect to gendered relations. Paludi and Helms Mills (2013) exploratory study into Latin American executive women found that navigating differences involved learning about the Other. Finally, Prasad's (2014: 528) autoethnographic experience of Jerusalem framed within CSM analysis 'brought to the level of consciousness my latent acceptance of prejudices that were engendered by a set of ethnocentric discourses'. There are then different possible applications for the CSM heuristic.

### *Data analysis*

Given the extensive historically-based data set in front of us, we discussed how we could best recreate the past within an attainable device that would engage and not overwhelm. We, as postmodernist scholars, were also focused on 'truth' being presented as plausible versus a legitimate fact. To be clear, in the modernist tradition, a historian 'factually' retells the past. We were inspired by Clark and Rowlinson's (2004: 331) 'historic turn' in organization studies to focus on what is plausible. To this end, we drew on the archival data to build a complex portrayal of Ruth Bates Harris via a story. The CSM framework helped us to recreate this individual (micro), the organizational rules and meta-rules (meso), and the formative (macro) contexts. In other words, we identified three key areas that would assist in recreating Ruth Bates Harris: discursively produced anchor points, NASA rules, and Civil Rights-Cold War values contexts.

Once our plausible story was created, we again reached to the CSM framework to analyze this story. We recognized that to understand a social reality we could not limit our analysis to 'just' an individual's anchor points. Social reality is much too complex to only look at it in this way. Thus, with respect to individual (re)constructions, we began by analyzing the discursive processes involved in the (re)creation of Ruth Bates Harris' anchor points. We analyzed the story with a focus on identity (re)construction to ensure that, first the individual was not 'lost', and second, that the anchor points' relationship to power-relations was examined.

One example of our application of CSM involves looking at the pre-NASA hiring time period of the story. One of Bates Harris' anchor points centered on job title discourses comes forward in these two excerpts:

Director of Equal Employment Opportunity [EEO] and Contract Compliance, NASA... [was]... to establish goals, procedures, and project activities to implement a

policy of equal employment opportunity and contract compliance throughout NASA. (U.S. Committee on Appropriations [USCA], 1974: 26)

In September 1971, Mrs. Ruth Bates Harris, a black female, was appointed as the director, NASA Equal Employment Opportunity. She brings to NASA a distinguished public service career. This change incorporates the EEO function with contract compliance function. Marriage of the two functions allows for greater latitude in operation. (USCA, 1974: 134)

Bates Harris was initially given the job title of ‘Director of Equal Employment Opportunity and *Contract Compliance*’<sup>6</sup>. This job titled reflected an attributed occupational role of being a highly-experienced Civil-Rights and Public Servant management professional. She was also recognized as being a ‘*revolutionary*’ in this field of EEO, based on her past experience in training police forces in Washington, D.C., and in being part of Martin Luther King Jr.’s organization committee. In addition, this job title and the occupational role intersected with Bates Harris’ social-identities; notably, she was identified as being a ‘*black female*’. This social-identity categorization was both sex-based, and racially-based. Bates Harris was then reconstructed as a complex individual, with important tensions reflected in her reconstruction.

With respect to organizational rules, we again wanted to focus on the power-relations and the consequences of these power effects. We first examined the discursively produced rules centered on NASA occupational roles, vague professional practices, and financial resources. Second, we considered how these various rules imposed orderings within the organization. Finally, the analysis framework helped us to look at how this limited individual interactions within the particular NASA social reality. For example, looking at the discourses surrounding Bates Harris’ change in job title, and in her occupational role, we found underscored what we called the swipe of the pen rule:

For reasons never fully explained this completed action [of naming Bates Harris Director of EEO and Contract Compliance] was superceded [sic] on the recommendation of the Associate Administrator for Organization and Management [Bernard Moritz], signed by his deputy... Subsequently a Special Announcement was issued assigning the Director of Industrial Relations [Robert King] the additional duty of Director of Equal Employment Opportunity Office and the incoming Human Rights official [Bates Harris], Deputy Director.... The re-titled position was accepted by the candidate [Bates Harris] with great reluctance. (USCSCASS, 1973: 205)

Discourses surrounding the removal of ‘*Contract Compliance*’ and Bates Harris’ apparent demotion to Deputy Director doesn’t appear to be of much importance

---

<sup>6</sup> Recall that text presented in single quotes and italics reflects the protagonist’s narrative.

since the ‘*Contract Compliance*’ part of the title and the associated role it imparted were taken away with a simple swipe of the pen by Moritz. It is important to recognize that Bates Harris hadn’t arrived in NASA yet when this demotion occurred. The resultant order, an African American woman ‘*under*’ a White man, a powerful visual and metaphorical representation of this swipe of the pen rule, was accomplished despite the NASA Executive Personnel Board’s approval of the original job title.

With respect to formative contexts, we focused on dominant social values as a context unto itself. These dominant social values were represented via the Civil Rights and the Cold War era symbol and metaphor. This analysis focus further addressed the possible power-relations at work within NASA. For example, the Nixon legislative framework change to Title VII, requiring all Federal EEO programs be adopted into the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, resulted in extensive back and forth discussions in the Low archival data set. We summarized the discourses in the plausible story, focusing on NASA Administrator Fletcher’s recurring and repeated ‘*mistakes*’ with respect to this legislation, and Bates Harris’ role in implementing this Act into the NASA context. We analyzed these discourses and found that the power-relations, in this web of interactions between Fletcher and Bates Harris, demonstrated that there existed limitations to Civil Rights as a social value within NASA. We deconstructed these discourses within a framework of macro concerns. Notably, the dominant assumption of Civil Rights was to correct wrongs in society. However, within NASA walls, this assumption could not transcend their own dominant social values. In other words, Fletcher through his repeated ‘*mistakes*’ and Bates Harris’ repeated calls to meet legislative requirements, and their back-and-forth discourses, that lasted months, resulted in imposing an order which Bates Harris’ would go to ‘*war*’ against. The impact of these macro Civil Rights NASA discourses on Bates Harris identity were then reflected in another one of her anchor points. She was branded with the anchor point of an ‘*activist*’, much to her frustration and in contrast to her professed self-identity: a self-described ‘*teacher*’ who ‘just [wanted] to set workshops and forums to help sensitize people and make them more responsive to others who are different’ (Bates Harris, 1991: 214).

## Results

We now present the results of our study. We begin with the plausible story of Ruth Bates Harris. We follow with the CSM analysis of this plausible story.

*The plausible story: The hiring, firing and rehiring of Ruth Bates Harris*

In the early 1970s, the percentage of women (16.5-17%) and minority (4.6-6%)<sup>7</sup> civil service employees in NASA was considerably below the numbers employed by the entire U.S. Federal government (U.S. Congress Senate Committee on Aeronautical and Space Sciences [USCSCASS], 1973). Within the professional levels – occupational positions classed as engineering, scientists, and professional administrative staff – the percentage of women (3.4%) and minority (2.6%) members of NASA were also noticeably low (U.S. General Account Office [USGAO], 1975). NASA Administrator James Fletcher, aware of these numbers, sent an emissary to approach Ruth Bates Harris to woo her away from her position as director of the Human Relations Commission in the District of Columbia. This wooing was based, in part, on her ‘national reputation’ (Holden, 1973: 804) as a ‘senior civil rights worker’ (USCSCASS, 1973: 215). Fletcher believed that Bates Harris as a ‘top-level official’ (USCSCASS, 1973: 215) would continue to ‘make improvements in minority and female employment within NASA... [by]... press[ing] continuously for improvement’ (USCSCASS, 1973: 215-216).

Bates Harris accepted the NASA contract to become, in 1971, the first woman and the first African American hired into a senior management position (Bates Harris, 1991). This contract recommended by the NASA Executive Personnel Board and signed by Administrator Fletcher to become the ‘Director of Equal Employment Opportunity [EEO] and Contract Compliance, NASA... [was]... to establish goals, procedures, and project activities to implement a policy of equal employment opportunity and contract compliance throughout NASA’ (USCA, 1974: 26). Various national media reports along with NASA local reports cited her new ‘*Director of EEO and Contract Compliance*’ position as a step in the right direction for NASA since it included the responsibility of ensuring external contractor compliance to meet EEO goals across the national space industry along with ensuring NASA’s own internal compliance (Mann, 1971; NASA, Ames Research Center, 1971b; 1971a; Holden, 1973; USCSCASS, 1973). NASA statements made before a subcommittee, on fiscal year 1974 Appropriations, would make official Bates Harris position and role in the equal opportunity program:

In September 1971, Mrs. Ruth Bates Harris, a black female, was appointed as the director, NASA Equal Employment Opportunity. She brings to NASA a distinguished public service career. This change incorporates the EEO function with contract compliance function. Marriage of the two functions allows for greater latitude in operation. (USCA, 1974: 134)

---

<sup>7</sup> Minority women were counted in both the minority and women groups, thereby artificially inflating the number of employees in each of these categories (U.S. General Account Office, 1975).

Later,

For reasons never fully explained this completed action was superceded [sic] on the recommendation of the Associate Administrator for Organization and Management [Bernard Moritz], signed by his deputy... Subsequently a Special Announcement was issued assigning the Director of Industrial Relations [Robert King] the additional duty of Director of Equal Employment Opportunity Office and the incoming Human Rights official [Bates Harris], Deputy Director.... The re-titled position was accepted by the candidate [Bates Harris] with great reluctance. (USCSCASS, 1973: 205)

Once installed into this Deputy Director position, Bate Harris recognized that there were some ‘...deep rooted problems. There were those in responsible positions who only gave lip service to EEO and at times, hardly that’ (Bates Harris, 1991: 260):

The few times spent with the Administrator [Fletcher] or Deputy Administrator [Low] found each to be attentive, and apparently concerned. Nonetheless, many of NASA’s problems had been allowed to fester so long that they were numerous, pervasive and difficult to surmount. Many employees had already resigned themselves to the idea that NASA had always been and always will be a haven for white males. (USCSCASS, 1973: 206)

In 1972, mid-way through Bates Harris’ tenure at NASA, President Nixon’s executive order on Federal EEO programs was adopted into the Equal Employment Opportunity Act. This Act would include public servants into the Civil Rights Act (Title VII), originally put in place in 1964. This amendment to Title VII necessitated changes in EEO reporting structures, requiring a direct link to a head of an agency. Bates Harris brought to Deputy Administrator Low’s attention this legislative change, attempting to convince him that ‘...the EEO office would command more respect and be more effective cosmetically, if the organizational structure showed EEO reporting directly to the Administrator’, (Low, 1970 109:7: Meeting Record, December 29, 1972)<sup>8</sup>. While discussions were starting – via numerous meetings and attempts by both Fletcher and Low to find a solution (Low, 1970 68:4: PN #91, April 14, 1973) – Bates Harris noticed ‘as usual’ (Bates Harris, 1991: 262) that she was the only woman and the only Black at NASA Administrator conferences. She also recognized that Affirmative Action programs across the government were winding down; budgets were no longer available for EEO initiatives and increasing staffing levels were no longer possible. Bates Harris likened NASA EEO initiatives to the metaphor of ‘peace and war’:

---

<sup>8</sup> Convention used for referencing Low’s archives is as follows: ‘Low, 1970-1974 box X, folder Y, Subject (Memorandum, Notes, Personal Note #, Meeting Record, etc), Date’ is shortened to ‘Low, 1970 X:Y: Subject: Date’.



Just as peace is fine as long as there are no wars, EEO is fine as long as there are no complaints. Our office was pushing hard against formidable resistance. There were those who thwarted our efforts to change management policies. There were those who resisted compliance with the new statute, the EEO Act of 1972... Everything was all right as long as government was telling private sector to adopt hiring and promotional programs that were representative of the civilian population, but getting government's house in order was something else. (Bates Harris, 1991: 261)

She continued to press to meet with Administrator Fletcher to 'urge elevation of the [EEO] office beyond the layers of bureaucracy to report directly to him', (Bates Harris, 1991: 262) referring to legislative frameworks and policies to support her arguments. After an initial refusal to change Bates Harris back to a higher position, Fletcher clarified that he had made a mistake and that he did agree to elevate the NASA EEO office. Three different titles were suggested to Bates Harris – Chairman of the NASA Equal Opportunity Council, Special Assistant to the Administrator for Equal Opportunity, and finally Deputy Administrator (Low, 1970 68:5: Memorandum, February 20, 1973; 68:5: Memorandum, March 2, 1973; 68:4: PN #91, April 14, 1973). Bates Harris though had reached a 'watershed' (Bates Harris, 1991: 262); she worried that she was returning to the 1960's Civil Rights unrest and activism. During the 1960's, she had wanted to 'just teach, to set workshops and forums to help sensitize people and make them more responsive to others who are different' (Bates Harris, 1991: 214). Following the campaign to convince Fletcher and Low of the necessity to comply with Nixon's legislation, Bates Harris officially became '*Deputy Assistant Administrator for Equal Opportunity Programs*' at NASA – '...the highest ranking woman in NASA, at a level higher than that of the astronauts' (Bates Harris, 1991: 1, 2, 267). Yet she was 'relieved of duties and given no specific responsibilities' (USCSCASS, 1973: 209).

October 11, 1973, Bates Harris – or simply '*RBH*' as she was referred to now at NASA – was 'terminated' (Low, 1970 61:3: Notebook 1, October 5, 1973) after refusing to resign. This termination was due to any number of reasons depending on who was narrating this part of the story. Extensive and nation-wide media reports claimed 'Mrs. Harris' (Delaney, 1973: 23) was fired due to her scathing report on NASA's efforts to right the wrongs of discrimination against minorities and women (Anderson, 1973; Associated Press, 1973; Beckley Post-Herald, 1973). This report highlighted both NASA's strengths and weaknesses:

NASA has demonstrated to the world that it has limitless imagination, vision, capability, courage and faith, limitless persistence and infinite space potential. It made the United States a winner in space and improved the quality of life for all people. ... However, in spite of sincere efforts on the part of some NASA management and employees, human rights in NASA have not even gotten off the ground. In fact, Equal Opportunity is a sham in NASA. (Bates Harris/Hogan/Lynn report to Fletcher, September 21, 1973, USCSCASS, 1973: 202)

The Washington Post editorial (1973) gained the attention of members of the U.S. Senate, the U.S. Congress, the White House and a number of political and lobbyist groups including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the National Urban League:

Civil Rights advocates have been fond for years of pointing out the incongruity of a nation's being able to send men to the moon and bring them safely back again without being able to deal very effectively with its racial problems here on earth....NASA Administrator James Fletcher denied the dismissal [of Bates Harris] had anything to do with the starkly candid report. He said, rather, that it resulted from intolerable 'discord and divisiveness' in the equal opportunity office. (Washington Post, Times Herald, 1973: A14)

NASA argued 'that the technical difficulty and urgency of its work make it hard to employ and promote as many women and members of minority groups as it would like' (Independent, 1973: 13), ignoring that NASA external contractors were able to hire three times more minorities. Administrator Fletcher went further stating that 'RBH' was fired as she 'became a seriously disruptive force' (Low, 1970 67:5; PN #107, November 13, 1973; Memorandum to All NASA employees, November 2, 1973: 2):

[We] couldn't have the kind of discord and divisiveness there was in that [EEO] office and still accomplish our objectives in this equal opportunity field ... I figured the only way we could solve this divisiveness [was] to ask for Mrs. Harris to resign. (Administrator Fletcher to the Chairmen USCSCASS, 1973: 154)

While media reports plainly stated that 'NASA "discriminates"' (UPI, 1973) referring to Bates Harris as 'uppity' (Rowan, 1973: 4) and the 'top black' (Anderson, 1973; Delaney, 1973; Independent, 1973), Fletcher's stance was to focus on the objective argument of improving the EEO effort itself:

It is not NASA's policy to in any way discriminate against women. In fact, quite to the contrary, our program is designed to improve the lot of women in NASA in all ways, increase the number of women in NASA, to move them up the ranks in terms of increased responsibility, and so on. The termination of Mrs. Harris' employment had absolutely nothing to do with that. Mrs. Harris was terminated primarily to improve the equal opportunities program in NASA. (Administrator Fletcher speaking to Senator Abourezk, USCSCASS, 1973: 152)

Supporters of RBH, on the other hand, stated that '...she had been discharged because she pressed the agency too much to improve its record' (Delaney, 1973: 23). Democratic South-Dakota Senator James Abourezk, committee member in the U.S. Senate's Aeronautical and Space Sciences, went further with regard to 'Mrs. Harris' stating 'I'm disturbed at what seems to be a trend that anybody who tries to do his [sic] job and is controversial because of it automatically finds himself [sic] out of work' (Associated Press, 1973: A2). Former colleagues of RBH added to

this voice, objecting to the Fletcher inference that Bates Harris was following in the footsteps of Angela Davis<sup>9</sup>. Rather, they regarded her as ‘thoughtful, reasonable, and easy to get along with’ (Holden, 1973: 806).

RBH now ‘numb and drained’ (Bates Harris, 1991: 2) recounted the day of the firing for the U.S. Committee on Appropriations:

[Harris] was told by the Administrator that much of the report [she wrote] was factual. She was also told that although it was a difficult decision to make since she was a dedicated person, nevertheless since she had indicated she found the present situation in the EEO office intolerable, he was offering one of two alternatives – either resign or her services would be terminated with severance pay... She was also told that she was impatient... The Administrator during the meeting commented that he thought when she joined NASA she was friendly, however, he felt she had joined others in confrontation. As an example, he considered a ‘confrontation’ the authors’ letter requesting his early decision regarding the report. (Bates Harris testimony, USCA, 1974: 77)

Less than one month after RBH had been terminated, NASA senior managers gathered together to plot the way ahead in the face of the growing storm in the media, in Congress, in the Senate and in the White House. Much to Low’s surprise, his senior staff including Mrs. Helen Kupperman from the Counsel’s office, recommended that they consider reinstating RBH in some capacity:

DISCRIMINATION SUIT – ([RBH] would have to prove that we were discrim. on basis of RACE or SEX...CLASS ACTION SUIT – Any third party – damages could be – promotions, etc...

Helen – she stands an almost even chance! (on sex discrim.)

\*RECORD of all mtgs w RBH! (*emphasis in original*) (Low, 1970 108:2: Note in Notebook 1, November 15, 1973)

A period of damage control, following the events surrounding RBH’s termination, involved a number of repeated presentations by Fletcher and Low to the U.S. Congress and to the Senate, quarterly reports outlining EEO objectives with U.S. Congress and Senate oversight committees. A short ten months later after her termination, as the highest ranking woman in NASA, Bates Harris was reinstated in August 1974. She now was placed into a senior management public relations position, without any EEO responsibilities, at a higher salary than her previous position.

---

<sup>9</sup> Angela Davis was a noted radical activist, and leading member of the Communist Party of the U.S. at the time.

*Analysis of the plausible story*

Focusing on the discursive processes within this plausible story, we present the first key area of our analysis, the range of Bates Harris’ NASA anchor points. While we could start with either of the other two key areas, namely, NASA rules or Civil-Rights/Cold War formative contexts, we believe that starting at the micro (individual) is more attainable for the reader.

Anchor points: Discursive constructions and reproductions: The (re)creation of Bates Harris, within the NASA organizational context, was accomplished, in part, via job titles and role assignments intersecting with varied identities. A summary of these intersecting social-identities, along with discourses surrounding job titles and role assignments, is presented in Table 1.

Story Signpost	Job Title	Role Assignment	Social-Identity Categories
Pre-NASA Hiring	<i>‘Director of Equal Employment Opportunity and Contract Compliance’</i>	highly-experienced Civil-Rights professional Revolutionary	a <i>‘black female’</i>
	<i>‘Deputy Director of Equal Employment Opportunity’</i>	<i>‘under’</i> a White man (Robert King) Limited Revolutionary	African American Woman
Mid-NASA Experience	<i>‘Deputy Assistant Administrator for Equal Opportunity Programs’</i>	<i>‘friendly’</i> <i>‘cosmetic elevation’</i> <i>‘highest ranking woman’</i> Navigating tension between creating revolutionary change and establishing limits to that revolution	African American Woman
Firing from NASA		<i>‘Mrs. Harris’</i> <i>‘RBH’</i> <i>‘joining others in confrontation’</i> rationality, introspection and <i>‘friendliness’</i> <i>‘uppity’</i> <i>‘doing her job’</i> Civil Activist End of the Revolutionary	<i>‘top black’</i>

Post-Firing from NASA		'terminating' 'serious disruptive force', 'confrontational' Civil Activist	a 'female' and a 'black'
NASA Re-hiring	Senior Public Relations Officer	'cosmetic' PR	African American Woman

Table 1: Bates Harris' Intersecting Anchor Points Summary

The next anchor point came to light via Bates Harris' attempts to convince Fletcher to follow President Nixon's new legislative norms on equal opportunity. This anchor point was premised on the new NASA job title '*Deputy Assistant Administrator for Equal Opportunity Programs*' intersecting with an African American woman and with the role assignment of being '*friendly*'. In addition, this anchor point was imbued with '*cosmetic elevation*', where no tangible responsibilities were assigned to Bates Harris. This '*cosmetics*' anchor point with its multiple intersections captured, and enclosed, Bates Harris within the superficiality of EEO within NASA. In contrast, and to illuminate this anchor point further, Fletcher could have embraced Nixon's initiative and worked with Bates Harris. Fletcher, in partnership with Bates Harris, could have continued to make revolutionary EEO change within NASA as opposed to creating an interaction between individuals who were beginning a '*war*'.

Moving to the point in the story of Bates Harris' firing, Bates Harris' anchor points were now created and reproduced via role assignments made by a variety of internal and external NASA sources. Namely, internal NASA management, media reports, U.S. legislative bodies, lobbyists and political relations all assigned her a variety of intersecting identities. These included: (a) '*Mrs. Harris*'<sup>10</sup> discursively reflecting her as a married woman in the press, and in Senate hearings; (b) behind NASA closed doors, she had been dehumanized into '*RBH*' while '*joining others in confrontation*'; (c) various references to Bates Harris including '*uppity*' and '*top black*'; (d) rationality, introspection and '*friendliness*' by friends; and, finally (e) a mix of these socially attributed identities intersecting with Bates Harris '*doing her job*'. Interestingly, none of her role assignments talked to her earned higher education (MBA). This is noteworthy given that a common discursive practice for this time for White men, and some Black men, was to be discursively identified as '*a PhD*'. The myriad intersections reflected here highlight confusion,

---

<sup>10</sup> White men, in contrast, were addressed with either their organizational position name prior to their family name (e.g., Administrator) or just their family name (e.g., Fletcher) (e.g., Low, 1970 109:6:Meeting Record, January 5, 1973; 68:5:Memorandum for the record, February 20, 1973).

contradiction, and order seeking of insiders and outsiders to NASA, occurring all at the same time.

Finally, Bates Harris would be recreated discursively again along two distinct, and separate, identity categories during the post-firing period of the story. She would be identified as either '*female*' or as '*black*'. Fletcher, along with his senior management team, reverted to discursive boundaries to make sense of the situation: by '*terminating*' Bates Harris, and discursively assigning to her what Fletcher felt was the NASA 'appropriate identity' (Townley, 1993: 537) of a '*serious disruptive force*', and of being '*confrontational*'. Eventually, Bates Harris would become once again a NASA employee where civil activism would no longer be part of her role assignment. Another boundary within NASA was set, one that would effectively eliminate the '*activist*', and would marginalize Bates Harris into a '*cosmetic*' public relations ordered reality.

NASA's organizational rules: Recognizing that social interactions are much too complex to only look at one aspect in a vacuum, we now turn to NASA's organizational rules and meta-rules. We deconstructed the plausible story via the rules surrounding occupational roles, vague professional practices, and financial resources.

*Rules surrounding occupational roles:* With respect to Bates Harris' job title, we concentrated our analysis on the 'initial confusion' (USCSCASS, 1973: 158) in 1971 surrounding her hiring, and on the discourses following her firing in 1973/1974. We found that NASA management discourses, in these two instances, promoted a specific kind of thinking. Specifically, the removal of '*Contract Compliance*' from Bates Harris' title doesn't appear to be of much importance since this part of the title could be taken away with a swipe of the pen. However, the resultant order imparted by this swipe of the pen rule – an African American woman '*under*' a White man underscored a powerful visual image. This job title and the resultant image was accomplished despite NASA's Executive Personnel Board approval of the job title, and the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee notification of this job title. The data surrounding this swipe of the pen rule were surprising: in 1971, the removal of '*Contract Compliance*' was done by senior NASA management without their having any level of awareness of what this title meant. Only in anticipation of the U.S. Senate and Congressional hearings looking into Bates Harris' firing did senior management, Low in particular, begin to investigate what '*Contract Compliance*' was, and what it actually meant! This swipe of the pen rule marked to us the beginning of constraining Bates Harris within a lived NASA reality '*under*' a White man, without an indication of awareness by those who applied this rule for what the title actually meant.

With respect to Bates Harris' occupational role within NASA, her role was unclear throughout the discursive evidence found, and recreated in the plausible story. This vagueness highlighted to us the existence of a 'cosmetic' occupational role rule. Bates Harris' EEO role to report on the status of minorities and women within NASA, could have been a definitive source of information for change within NASA. However, she was not explicitly called upon to do so by senior management. In addition, by 'cosmetically elevating' Bates Harris, it became clear to us that Fletcher had not expected to be called upon directly to press for change with respect to EEO. This is seen in his various discourses during the post-firing stage of Bates Harris' NASA tenure, where while the EEO report was telling the 'truth' about representation, Fletcher would characterize this 'truth'-telling as being 'confrontational' and 'unfriendly'. Bates Harris, on the other hand, either could not see, or did not want to work within, the imposed 'cosmetics'. She found herself embracing a social activist anchor point, imposed by others, via various discursive acts. As this activist anchor point is central, we expand on its creation and recreation with a consideration of the vague professional rules.

*Vague professional practices:* We found no discursive evidence of what the NASA EEO changes should be. In the presence of this vague EEO professional practice, we did find discursive evidence that NASA senior management and employees reverted to their own personal professional values. These subjective professional values were relied upon to: 'give lip service to EEO and at times, hardly that'; being 'attentive', 'concerned' but with no action; and, a sense of 'resignation' that NASA would be a haven for White men with the token status of an African American woman acceptable as long as she was 'friendly'. Similarly, Bates Harris reverted to her own subjective values, reflected by her return to the 1960's Civil Rights activism experiences, to guide her production of the EEO report for Fletcher. This vague professional practices rule contributed, in part, to how Bates Harris thought she could and had to act, constraining her again to a civil activism anchor point imposed by others. So while there were vague professional practices with respect to EEO and to Bates Harris' occupational role, we found discursive limits imposed on Bates Harris via a variety of subjective professional values embraced within NASA. The tension between these vague professional practices, and the use of subjective values contributed, we believe, to marginalizing Bates Harris further into a civil rights activist. It is important to understand that we are not advocating for professional practices over personal values, or vice versa. What we are highlighting in our analysis is the presence of personal values as a rule, and the lack of discursive evidence with respect to professional practices as another rule.

*Rules around financial resources:* For NASA, the race to the moon during the Cold War necessitated extensive and ballooning budgets that were unsustainable (De Groot, 2006). Beginning in 1967, and continuing into the period in question in

this study, financial resources were no longer available for many initiatives including EEO. This marked the arrival of austerity as a NASA meta-rule. This was discursively evident with Bates Harris' recognition that government led Affirmative Action programs were winding down. We recognized also that Fletcher and senior management were limited in how they could act within the austerity and EEO initiative meta-rules. Specifically, they were unable to increase funding for such initiatives, or to increase grade-levels, and so hired in lower-grades to increase the '*cosmetics*' of diversity. This resource ordering, coupled with the vague professional practices rule presented above, assisted in defining how things got done in imparting a '*cosmetic*' order. By this very social enactment of '*cosmetics*', an exclusionary reality was recreated within NASA.

Formative contexts of Civil Rights-Cold War era: We consider next in our analysis the Civil Rights/Cold War social values era via the '*peace and war*' metaphor, and the pioneer symbol. This pioneer symbolism was not explicitly stated in the plausible story but is presented here as interrupted evidence. We focused on these two discursive processes to address the social values context, and its influence on Bates Harris' anchor points, beyond the meso considerations of the NASA context alone.

We presented evidence in the plausible story that Fletcher and Low were both '*attentive*' and '*concerned*' with respect to civil rights and NASA EEO efforts. Fletcher had, after all, sought out Bates Harris, a highly-respected professional in EEO, to bring NASA's EEO efforts forward with respect to diversity and inclusion. We were therefore surprised within the mid-NASA storytelling to find evidence that was contrary to the discourses of the early pre-NASA storytelling. The first surprise revolved around the U.S. President Nixon legislative changes that would require NASA to comply with Affirmative Action in the civil service. We were taken aback by the narrative evidence that reflected Fletcher's resistance to the Civil Rights Act (Title VII). The first author initially believed (erroneously) that Affirmative Action in the early 1970's would be an established practice, especially following the U.S. Civil Rights unrest of the 1960's. The extensive back and forth discussions found in the archival data, summarized in the plausible story, between Fletcher and Bates Harris, demonstrated that there were limitations to embracing the social values of civil rights within NASA. Most troubling was Fletcher's repeated and recurring self-identified '*mistakes*' in his discussions with Bates Harris and her responsibilities, and her need to directly report to the NASA Administrator. While we commend Fletcher for admitting his numerous '*mistakes*', we couldn't help but think about his lack of '*mistakes*' in his efforts for the U.S.' continued presence in space. Fletcher and his team of senior administrators were responsible for an extensive suite of technological innovations



including Spacelab, the beginnings of the Space Shuttle, and the Viking and Voyager programs.

The second surprise was with respect to Bates Harris' explicit discursive call to the '*peace and war*' metaphor. This metaphor was, to our minds, a call to civil activism influenced by the NASA rules context previously discussed. This plea mobilized a specific kind of thinking; Bates Harris could have, for example, invoked pacifism along the lines of Martin Luther King Jr.'s type of Civil Rights activism, which she had participated in as an organizer. However, she called to those in the trenches of EEO who must '*push hard against formidable resistance*' to win compliance of '*those who thwarted our efforts*'. This metaphor use, and the legislative changes to EEO, reflected back to us a social enactment of a 'them-versus-us' type of order. This social order was then defined by battle lines, and attempts at conquest, not a 'universal language of peace and brotherhood' (Bates Harris, 1991: 158).

Moving to the Cold War context, we followed the use of the space pioneer symbolism in the archives. This symbol has been extensively used and reflected in the 1960's/1970's discourses of the space race to the moon (see Wolfe, 1979). Fletcher also used pioneer symbolism multiple times when addressing various media, and government entities with respect to space (see USCSCASS, 1973). Fletcher made it clear that he wanted to continue to lead in the pioneering work of space exploration. However, African American women apparently could only stretch this pioneering value so far. The Bates Harris interrupted discursive evidence within the U.S. Congressional and Senate transcripts, in particular, highlighted that 'NASA wasn't ready to see any minority share the responsibility', (USCSCASS, 1973: 205). Similarly, the 'wild-eyed radicals who needed a "safe" white male manager', (USCSCASS, 1973: 205) was as pioneering as Fletcher was prepared to be.

The Washington Post also invoked the pioneer symbolism. Their use of this symbol was within the context of the U.S.'s ability to conquer space and communism. They applied the symbol to all humankind being unable to deal very effectively with its racial problems here on earth; *how can it be that we cannot be pioneers in the realm of racial inequality?* is one question the Post's symbolism use invokes. Similar to Fletcher, the Post's stretching of the pioneer to racial problems had no logical or rational argument provided. This symbolism mobilized a specific kind of agency to promote action. More specifically, the Post's call to action to address racial inequality was one based on an emotionally-charged conquering of communism, by beating the Russians to space in the Cold War. Battle lines were drawn and conquered in space. Racial inequality, however, could not be relegated to a simple conclusion of 'good' vs 'bad', 'Americanism' vs 'Communism'. What is interesting here is that through this simple discursive comparison, the

Washington Post editors made the general public aware of NASA's exclusionary social reality. Political lobbyists, U.S. Senators, U.S. Congressman, the President, the NAACP and the National Urban League were all activated via this grassroots '*call to arms*'. This '*war*' contributed in the long term to the creation of awareness and of willingness on NASA's part to meet legislative requirements over the next 45 years! The infusion of EEO-specific financial resources by Senator Moss, Chair of the Senate's Committee on Aeronautical and Space Sciences, in particular, would set the stage for long term gains in diversity initiatives at NASA.

## So what?

As postmodern researchers, we hold ourselves responsible to shine a light on an individual, a context, an argument, an era, etc., in such a way that a plausible understanding of an event, experience, or a person, can be 'seen'. This plausible understanding does not imply that we are telling one 'truth'; we are bringing forward one possible interpretation among many possible 'truths'. We take this stance to add value, and to contribute to, different ways of looking at social reality. To this end, we identified at the beginning of this paper that our research was focused on considering how an individual comes to be marginalized, and adding to our understanding of the application of intersectionality. We consider these two issues, and what we achieved with respect to each, with this study.

With respect to the marginalized individual, we demonstrated that an individual can be (re)created via anchor points that have meaning, and that impart an order. If we had looked at Bates Harris as just a woman or just an African American, we believe the analysis would not have embraced the complexities of her lived-experience, and of who she was becoming. Describing Bates Harris as just an African American or just as a woman would have, we believe, perpetuated her marginalization as a stereotypical, essentialized Black Woman. Think back, for a moment, to how we introduced this study into Bates Harris, and consider what you as the reader thought initially of Bates Harris. Your perception of her has changed, we hope, following our analysis of the plausible story. Bates Harris was an amalgam of intersecting social-identities that included job titles, and role assignments, that are interdependent and that constitute each other. She was a complex individual who, we believe, must be reflected via more than two distinct identity categories separated out, and ordered, via mundane discourses.

The range of NASA-driven rules – occupational roles, vague professional practices, and financial resources – assisted in our deconstruction of discourses presented in the plausible story. Specifically, we considered how rules interacting with anchor points imposed an order. Bates Harris was placed under a White man, then

elevated to a position with no responsibilities, then branded a Black Woman Civil Activist who was confrontational, and excluded/terminated from NASA, to then be brought back within the organization that would prohibit her from assuming an anchor point of Black Woman Civil Activist. The formative contexts of Civil Rights/Cold War era highlighted the macro social values of *'peace and war'* and of being a pioneer. The *'war'* with respect to EEO, within the context of NASA in the early 1970's, was not close to being finished.

With respect to our goal of putting intersectionality to work, we focus on one particular contribution of this study. In spite of the enormous amount of data before us, we were able to reconstruct a complex individual via her range of ephemeral, discursive anchor points. We demonstrated that the complex marginalized reality of one individual within an organization, in a particular era, can be recreated and studied empirically within the notion of intersectionality. We have found that many intersectionality studies revert to simple listings of different identities without necessarily addressing the meanings associated with intersectionality. The interaction and interdependence of complex identities, influenced by meso and macro social contexts in our case, represented by a reworked anchor point concept, and the resultant marginalized order, are the key issues of intersectionality that we treated empirically.

The remaining intersectionality key issue of social justice remains to be addressed. Some initial reviews of this paper pointed out that a study focused on the Civil Rights/Cold War era was limited given that this was a different time, with different values and discourses. Some reviewers went so far as to state that we could not interpret what happened in the early 1970's given our twenty-first century perspective. The first author's experiences, in both presenting Ruth Bates Harris to conference audiences and in her own lived reality within the space industry of today, talk to a need to bring Bates Harris' plausible story forward into the twenty-first century. There continues to be damaging/marginalizing discourses in the space industry to this day, in spite of legislative work that is supposed to address discrimination and inequalities in the work force. By looking to the past and to the more blatant discourses, social values and power-relations of inequalities, the hidden discourses of the present can be examined to disrupt the status quo that continues to marginalize individuals working in the space industry.

## Conclusion

We seized the opportunity to return to an organizational past to highlight that intersectionality and its application, within an organizational setting is possible, contributing to our understanding of how to put intersectionality to work. We

demonstrated one possible avenue of how to apply intersectionality, by using a reworked anchor point concept, and by considering an organizational context based on rules, meta-rules, and social values. We were able to analyze, via the CSM framework, a plausible story based on extensive archival data to extract Ruth Bates Harris' range of anchor points, and to study the influence of rules and meta-rules, and the formative contexts of the time on her identities. The promise of intersectionality as an empirical heuristic can be measured by the quality of the recreation of a complex individual, via her intersecting identities that embraced not only her social-identity categories but her job titles and occupational roles. This promise can also be measured by the quality of the representation of a specific context by uncovering NASA's rules, meta-rules and formative contexts, and their role in marginalizing this complex individual.

## references

- Acker, J. (2006) 'Inequality regimes: Gender, class, and race in organizations', *Gender and Society*, 20(4): 441-464.
- Anderson, J. (1973) 'How White House kept lid on costs of Nixon's homes - Bootleg report', *The Daily Mail*, 3 November.
- Associated Press (1973) 'Dismissal defended by NASA', *The Washington Post, Times Herald* (1959-1973), 31 October. [<http://o-search.proquest.com.aupac.lib.athabascau.ca/docview/148313506/abstract/56551BAA7B954878PQ/20?accountid=8408>].
- Bates Harris, R. (1991) *Harlem princess: The story of Harry Delaney's daughter*. 1st edn. New York, NY: Vantage Press.
- Beckley Post-Herald (1973) 'The News...In Brief...The highest ranking woman...', *Beckley Post-Herald*, 29 October.
- Bowleg, L. (2008) 'When black + lesbian + woman [not equal to] black lesbian woman: The methodological challenges of qualitative and quantitative intersectionality research', *Sex Roles*, 59(5-6): 312-325.
- Calás, M., H. Ou and L. Smircich (2013) "'Woman" on the move: Mobile subjectivities after intersectionality', *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 32(8): 708-731.
- Carroll, W.R., J. Helms Mills and A.J. Mills (2008) 'Managing identity and resistance : Making critical sense of call centre management', *Gérer l'identité et la résistance: Comprendre de manière critique la gestion des centres d'appel*, 25(6): 57-81.

- Cho, S., K. Crenshaw and L. McCall (2013) 'Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis', *Signs*, 38(4): 785-810.
- Clark, P. and M. Rowlinson (2004) 'The treatment of history in organisation studies: Towards an "historic turn"?'', *Business History*, 46(3): 331-352.
- Cohen, C.J. (1999) *The boundaries of blackness: AIDS and the breakdown of black politics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Coleman, G. and A. Rippin (2000) 'Putting feminist theory to work: Collaboration as a means towards organizational change', *Organization*, 7(4): 573-587.
- Collins, P.H. (2009) *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Collins, P.H. and S. Bilge (2016) *Intersectionality*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989) 'Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989: 139-167.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991) 'Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6): 1241-1299.
- Davis, K. (2014) 'Intersectionality as critical methodology', in N. Lykke (ed.) *Writing academic texts differently: Intersectional feminist methodologies and the playful art of writing*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- De Groot, G.J. (2006) *Dark side of the moon: The magnificent madness of the American lunar quest*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Delaney, P. (1973) 'Top black woman is ousted by NASA: Aide is transferred dismissal follows dispute over equal employment', *New York Times*, 28 October.
- Ely, R.J. and D.E. Meyerson (2000) 'Advancing gender equity in organizations: The challenge and importance of maintaining a gender narrative', *Organization*, 7(4): 589-608.
- Fairclough, N. (2001) 'Critical discourse analysis', in A. McHoul and M. Rapley (eds.) *How to analyze talk in institutional settings: A casebook of methods*. London: Continuum.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2012) *Making social science matter: Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York, NY: Random House (Vintage Books).
- Foucault, M. (1978) 'Politics and the study of discourse', *Ideology & Consciousness*, 3(Spring): 7-26.

- Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1988) *Politics philosophy culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (2001) *Madness and civilization: A history of insanity in the age of reason*. London: Routledge.
- Fraser, N. (1989) *Unruly practices: Power, discourse, and gender in contemporary social theory*. Minnesota, MA: University of Minnesota Press.
- Friedman, S.S. (1995) 'Beyond white and other: Relationality and narratives of race in feminist discourse', *Signs*, 21(1): 1-49.
- Glenn, E.N. (2004) *Unequal freedom: How race and gender shaped American citizenship and labor [Kindle DX Version]*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Grant, D., T.W. Keenoy and C. Oswick (1998) 'Introduction: Organizational discourse: Of diversity, dichotomy and multi-disciplinarity', in D. Grant, T.W. Keenoy and C. Oswick (eds.) *Discourse and organization*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hartt, C., J. Helms Mills and A.J. Mills (2012) 'Reading between the lines: Gender, work and history: The case of the Nova Scotia Teachers' Union', *Journal of Management History*, 18(1): 82-95.
- Hearn, J. (2014) 'On men, organizations and intersectionality: Personal, working, political and theoretical reflections (or how organization studies met profeminism)', *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 33(5): 414-428.
- Hearn, J. and J. Louvrier, (2015) 'Theories of difference, diversity and intersectionality: What do they bring to diversity management?' in R. Bendl, I. Bleijenbergh, E. Henttonen and A.J. Mills (eds.) *The Oxford handbook of diversity in organizations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Helms Mills, J. and A.J. Mills (2009) 'Critical sensemaking and workplace inequities', in M. Özbilgin (ed.) *Equality, diversity and inclusion at work: A research companion*. Glos: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Helms Mills, J., A. Thurlow and A.J. Mills (2010) 'Making sense of sensemaking: The critical sensemaking approach', *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 5(2): 182-195.
- Holden, C. (1973) 'NASA: Sacking of top black woman stirs concern for equal employment', *Science*, 182(4114): 804-807.

- hooks, b. (1981) *Ain't I a woman: Black women and feminism*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Hull, G.T., P.B. Scott and B. Smith (1982) *But some of us are brave: Black women's studies*. New York, NY: Feminist Press at CUNY.
- Ibarra, H. (1999) 'Provisional selves: Experimenting with image and identity in professional adaptation', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(4): 764-791.
- Independent (1973) 'NASA's hiring policy. [Editorial]', *Independent*, 3 December.
- King, D. (1988) 'Multiple jeopardy, multiple consciousness: The context of a black feminist ideology', *Signs*, 14(1): 42-72.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998) 'Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education?', *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1): 7-24.
- Low, G.M. (1970) 'George M. Low papers: Correspondence, notebooks, sensitive files, personal notes. (Accession #: 87-12, Series IV). [<http://archives.rpi.edu/archon/index.php?p=collections/controlcard&id=80>].
- Lykke, N. (2005) 'Nya perspektiv på intersektionalitet. Problem och möjligheter [New perspectives on intersectionality. Problems and possibilities]', *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift [Journal of Gender Research]*, 26(2-3): 7-17.
- Mann, J. (1971) 'Montgomery aide to take NASA post', *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 25 August.
- McCall, L. (2005) 'The complexity of intersectionality', *Signs*, 30(3): 1771-1800.
- Mercer, D., M.I. Paludi, A.J. Mills and J. Helms Mills (2015) 'Intersectionality at the intersection: Paradigms, methods and application - a review', in R. Bendl, I. Bleijenbergh, E. Henttonen and A.J. Mills (eds.) *Oxford handbook on diversity in organizations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Meyerson, D.E. and D.M. Kolb (2000) 'Moving out of the 'armchair': Developing a framework to bridge the gap between feminist theory and practice', *Organization*, 7(4): 553-571.
- Mills, A.J. and J. Helms Mills (2018) 'Archival research', in C. Cassell, A. Cunliffe and G. Grandy (eds.) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research methods in business and management*. London: SAGE.
- Mills, A.J. and S.J. Murgatroyd (1991) *Organizational rules: A framework for understanding organizations*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Mohanty, C.T. (1988) 'Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses', *Feminist Review*, 30(1): 61-88.

- Monture, P.A. (1986) 'Ka-Nin-Geh-Heh-Gah-E-Sa-Nonh-Yah-Gah', *Canadian Journal of Women & the Law*, 2(1): 159-170.
- Moraga, C. and G. Anzaldúa (2015) *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Naples, N.A. (2009) 'Teaching intersectionality intersectionally', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 11(4): 566-577.
- Nash, J. C. (2008) 'Re-thinking intersectionality', *Feminist Review*, 89(1): 1-15.
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration [NASA], Ames Research Center (1971a) 'EEO leaders - picture', 9 December.
- National Aeronautics and Space Administration [NASA], Ames Research Center (1971b) 'NASA EEO Director to visit Ames', 11 November.
- Paludi, M.I. and J. Helms Mills (2013) 'Making sense of the Latin American "other": Executive women in Argentina', *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 32(8): 732-755.
- Parker, I. (1992) *Discourse dynamics*. London: Routledge.
- Phillips, N. and C. Hardy (2002) *Discourse analysis: Investigating processes of social construction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Prasad, A. (2014) 'Corporeal ethics in an ethnographic encounter: A tale of embodiment from the Occupied Palestinian Territories', *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 30(4): 525-531.
- Rowan, C.T. (1973) 'NASA fires "uppity" black', *The Salina Journal*, 28 December.
- Staunæs, D. (2003) 'Where have all the subjects gone? Bringing together the concepts of intersectionality and subjectification', *NORA: Nordic Journal of Women's Studies*, 11(2): 101-110.
- Stone, S. (2006) 'The "Empire" strikes back: A posttranssexual manifesto', in S. Stryker and S. Whittle (eds.) *The transgender studies reader*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Talbot, M. (2010) *Language and gender*. Cambridge: Polity.
- The Combahee River Collective (1979) 'A black feminist statement', in Z. Eisenstein (ed.) *Capitalist patriarchy and the case for socialist feminism*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.
- Thurlow, A. (2007) *Meaningful change: Making sense of the discourse of the language of change*. Halifax, CA: Sobey School of Business, Saint Mary's University.



- Torres, L.E. (2012) 'Lost in the numbers: Gender equity discourse and women of color in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)', *The International Journal of Science in Society*, 3(4): 33-45.
- Townley, B. (1993) 'Foucault, power/knowledge, and its relevance for human resource management', *Academy of Management Review*, 18(3): 518-545.
- Unger, R.M. (1987a) *Plasticity into power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Unger, R.M. (1987b) *Social theory: Its situation and its task*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- UPI (1973) 'Briefs:...National NASA "discriminates"', *The Morning Herald*, 29 October.
- U.S. Committee on Appropriations [USCA] (1974) *Department of Housing and Urban Development, space, science, veterans, and certain other independent agencies appropriations for fiscal year 1975: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate, Ninety-third Congress, second session, on H.R. 15572*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. [<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015071090214>].
- U.S. Congress Senate Committee on Aeronautical and Space Sciences [USCSCASS] (1973) *Space shuttle payloads: Hearing before the Committee on Aeronautical and Space Sciences, United States Senate, Ninety-third Congress, first session on space missions, payloads, and traffic for the space shuttle era, October 30, 1973, Part I*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. [<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=ien.35556040418071;view=1up;seq=2>].
- U.S. General Account Office [USGAO] (1975) 'Equal opportunity: National aeronautics and space administration's equal employment opportunity program could be improved'. U.S. General Accounting Office. [<http://www.gao.gov/products/FPCD-75-107>].
- Van Herk, K.A., D. Smith and C. Andrew (2011) 'Examining our privileges and oppressions: Incorporating an intersectionality paradigm into nursing', *Nursing Inquiry*, 18(1): 29-39.
- Washington Post, Times Herald (1973) 'Racism, sexism and space ventures [editorial]', *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 24 November.
- Watson, T.J. (2008) 'Managing identity: Identity work, personal predicaments and structural circumstances', *Organization*, 15(1): 121-143.
- Weeks, J. (1989) *Sex, politics, and society: The regulation of sexuality since 1800*. 2nd ed. London: Longman.
- Weick, K.E. (1993) 'The solapse of sensemaking in organisations: The Mann Gulch disasters', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38(4): 628-652

Weick, K.E. (1995) *Sensemaking in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Weick, K.E., K.M. Sutcliffe and D. Obstfeld (2005) 'Organizing and the process of sensemaking', *Organization Science*, 16(4): 409-421.

Wolfe, T. (1979) *The Right Stuff*. New York, NY: PICADOR.

## **the authors**

Stefanie Ruel, former Life Sciences Mission Manager at the Canadian Space Agency, recently defended her doctorate at Athabasca University, Canada. Her research interests include a critical examination of intersectionality and diversity in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) contexts of the space industry, and on historical and contemporary, gendered practices.

Email: stefanie.ruel@videotron.ca

Albert J. Mills is Director of the Sobey PhD in Management at Saint Mary's University, Canada, and an 2.0 Professor of Innovation at the University of Eastern Finland. His research interests mainly focus on gendered practices and historical embeddedment.

Email: Albert.Mills@smu.ca

Janice Lynne Thomas is Department Chair for Organizational Analysis at Athabasca University, Canada. She is interested in change, project management and the assumptions underlying professional practice, communication and identify construction.

Email: Janice.Thomas@fb.athabascau.ca