
Ethics, politics and feminist organizing: Writing feminist infrapolitics and affective solidarity into everyday sexism

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Abstract

This article critically examines a 21st century online, social movement, the Everyday Sexism Project (referred to as the ESP), to analyse resistance against sexism that is systemic, entrenched and institutionalized in society, including organizations. Our motivating questions are: what new forms of feminist organizing are developing to resist sexism and what are the implications of thinking ethico-politically about feminist resistance that has the goals of social justice, equality and fairness? Reading the ESP in this way leads to a conceptualization of how infrapolitical feminist resistance emerges at grassroots level and between individuals in the form of affective solidarity, which become necessary in challenging neoliberal threats to women's opportunity and equality. Our contribution conceptualizes affective solidarity as central to this feminist resistance against sexism and involves two modes of feminist organizing: the politics of experience and empathy. By addressing the ethical and political demands of solidarity we can build resurgent, politically vibrant feminist organizing and resistance that mobilizes feminist consciousness and builds momentum for change. Our conclusion is that an ethico-politics of feminist resistance moves away from individualizing experiences of sexism towards collective resistance and organizes solidarity, experience and empathy that may combat ignorance and violence towards women.

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affect, embodiment, everyday sexism, feminism ethics, infrapolitics, solidarity

Introduction

Just emerged from a feminist conference & my driver announced he'd consider fucking me. I'd set the car on fire, if I didn't need the ride. (ESP website post, May 2017)

Critical studies of organization have long recognized that gender is an integral feature of organizations (Clegg, 1989), that gendered organizations and their impact on organizational bodies are complex (Acker, 1990), and that women's intentional subordination in organizations should be explicitly named (Mills, 1988). More directly, Itzin and Newman (1995) identified sexism and misogyny along with patriarchal culture as core features of gendered organizational cultures; and Cockburn (1991) surfaced the backlash of speaking out against gender inequality. Feminist organization studies has burgeoned since early interventions (see, for example, Calás and Smircich, 1999), and numerous studies confirm that workplaces are central sites for many women's experiences of sexism: from unpaid and unrecognized labour (Acker, 1990); career barriers to advancement (Biggs et al., 2018); being treated differently (Powell and Sang, 2015); and fear of physical, unwanted contact (McLaughlin et al., 2017).

Sexism in universities has not escaped academic scrutiny (Deem, 2003), and academic institutions from universities to journals are under pressure to speak out against entrenched, systemic sexism. This article contributes to this speaking out against sexism, and we are aware that this requires breaching patriarchal privilege and power (Segal, 2017) in doing so. Calder-Dawe (2015: 90–91) reminds us that the “unspeakability” of sexism is more than an absence of talk: it is a structured silence' that confines what is said and when, or we find ourselves reluctant to speak out at all. Audre Lorde (cited in Ahmed, 2015) notes that sexism (and racism) are ‘grown up words’ that we experience before we have the language to express them. Sexism can be defined as gender-based false aspirations/ideals, discrimination or stereotyping (Calder-Dawe and Gavey, 2016), although in the course of the article we devote space to participants who define the process themselves.

Despite decades of feminist activism, feminists including Sara Ahmed (2015: 5) confirm that sexism still persists in shaping our worlds and operates ‘as a well-oiled machine that runs all the more smoothly and efficiently for being in constant use’. Ahmed (2015: 8) elaborates: ‘[t]he critique of sexism is a form of intellectual and political labour that teaches us how worlds are built; how histories become concrete’. There is a challenge to make the language of sexism heard, especially where sexist practices evade critique by being couched as *passé*, retro or ironic (Calder-Dawe and Gavey, 2016). Moreover, there is pressure on individual women to resist sexism and ‘when we give problems their names we can become a problem by naming a problem’ (Ahmed, 2015: 9). It is in this way that individual resistance endures rather than looking towards collective resistance and structural and cultural redress.

In this article, we analyse women's resistance to sexism in a social movement: the Everyday Sexism Project (<http://everydaysexism.com/>, hereafter referred to as ‘the

ESP') started by Laura Bates in 2012 and that demonstrates how an online space becomes an essential building block for feminist mobilization. This project involves an anonymized sharing website that catalogues sexism (Bates, 2014a) and enables a particular form of resistance and feminist solidarity (Bates, 2018) and importantly addresses different axes of oppression between women (Collins and Bilge, 2016). Our analysis develops a conceptualization of feminist organizing, suggesting that the ESP reveals a feminist *infrapolitics* typified by 'a wide variety of low-profile forms of resistance that dare not speak in their own name' (Scott, 1990: 19). Such *infrapolitics* reveals the importance of affective solidarity, which is a central organizing feature in feminist resistance against sexism. Thus, our conceptual aim of the article is to demonstrate that the ESP as a social movement can build affective solidarity as it emerges between experience and bodies that offer radical, ethical and political possibilities for change (cf. Ahmed, 2004a; Hemmings, 2012). Addressing the ethico-political demand of solidarity, where ethico-politics can be defined as 'that arena where ethics is mobilized into action creates a politics directed by ethics' (Pullen and Rhodes 2014: 788), is vital for the transformation of workplaces that normalize culturally and institutionally sanctioned sexism. The ESP is an exemplary mode of feminist organizing and politics (Bates, 2018) that builds connections between women (and some men), moving incrementally towards change by speaking out, resisting and taking action. Feminist solidarity is explicitly visible in an unprecedented way in contemporary social movements that are directly combatting women's inequality, sexual harassment and violence against women in the workplace and beyond. This is evident in labour movements using the #MeToo hashtag, the associated 'Time's Up' campaign, the One Million Women movement and the global Women's March, to name a handful.¹

Patricia Yancey Martin spoke of the transformational potential of feminism involving 'a vision of society that does not exist and sees social, political, and economic change as necessary for that vision to be realized' (Martin, 1990: 184). Twenty-eight years later, we ask: is it possible that we are now starting to fully realize feminism's transformational potential in the ethico-political resistance against sexism? Last year, Gloria Steinem (2017) testified that she had never seen a time like this point in history for women's political activism. These movements are testament to how feminist solidarity is developing across different forms of women's resistance and activism addressing sexual harassment, violence and sexism with the intention to develop strategies for social change.

The emergence of this new solidarity stands in stark contrast to the arguments of the erosion of women's collective efforts during times of neoliberal rationality (Brown, 2015; Segal, 2017)² – times where feminism appears to have been confined to 'atomised individualism' (Rottenberg, 2018: np). Solidarity has been seen as an ideal and myth amongst many feminists (Cornwall, 2007). Drawing on Hannah Arendt, Andrea Cornwall reflects on the myths surrounding women's solidarity and empowerment in Africa, and states that 'solidarity can be recast as something that can be actively constructed through identification with a shared concern about issues of social and gender injustice' (Cornwall, 2007: 165). New feminist movements are showing once again how solidarity is central to women's collective working and resistance (cf. *Signs*, 2017). Moreover, this resurgent and vibrant feminism is emerging in and fuelled by social media, and has been said to constitute a fourth wave or circuit of feminism (Munro, 2013), typified by the inclusion

of younger women and use of social media. Although the creation of a new era in feminism has been challenged, 'it is increasingly clear that the internet has facilitated the creation of a global community of feminists who use the internet both for discussion and activism' (Munro, 2013: 23) and has developed 'a culture in which sexism or misogyny can be 'called out' and challenged' (Munro, 2013: 23). Whether we are in a fourth wave or not, Ealasaid Munro argues that academic feminists are guilty of failing to adequately explore the shape this turn is taking.

Organisations World Pulse, a social network aimed at connecting women globally through social media, and the ESP, which documents stories of sexism, are testament to the vibrant and expanding nature of feminist political mobilization (cf. Lyshaug, 2006) and the potential of mass movements through online methods and social media. Such resistance relies on mobilizing feminist consciousness that attends to the gap between individual subjectivity and a sense of solidarity through community. We take inspiration from Elspeth Probyn's writings on feminist reflexivity that we use our 'sexed selves in order to engender alternative feminist positions in discourse' and 'construct alternative feminist enunciative positions' (Probyn, 1993: 1). Probyn distinguishes 'between an embodied sense of self and the self we are expected to be in social terms, between the experience of ourselves over time and the experience of possibilities and limits to how we may act or be' that prioritizes 'feminist activity (reflexive disruption) over identity or belonging' (Hemmings, 2012: 149).

For Clare Hemmings (2012) affective solidarity is the 'question of affect – misery, rage, passion, pleasure – that gives feminism its life' (2012: 150). The concept of affective solidarity is important here given the purpose of the ESP to build solidarity through affective means often existent in the spaces between personal and public spheres. In this article, we demonstrate that affective solidarity as feminist resistance is enhanced by two modes of feminist organizing – the politics of experience (Phipps, 2016) and economies of empathy (Pedwell, 2012a). Given that neoliberal culture polices affective solidarity, the importance of conceptualizing affective solidarity as an infrapolitics is central to effective feminist resistance. This resistance evident in the ESP contributes to a potential mass movement (cf. Rottenberg, 2017), to which we return in the final section of the article.

The article unfolds as follows: first, we discuss the ESP as a form of feminist organizing and resistance that is infrapolitical. Second, the way resistance is narrated in the ESP is investigated to conceptualize affective solidarity. Following on, we explore the ESP as a contemporary example of infrapolitical feminist resistance, and in doing so reveal how affective solidarity is supported by two further modes of feminist organizing: the politics of experience and empathy. In the final section, we offer concluding thoughts regarding the ethico-political implications of mobilizing solidarity based on affective, embodied experiences in the resistance against sexism.

The ESP, feminist organizing and resistance

There have been notable changes in the ways in which feminist projects manifest from 'protest to engagement' (Walby, 2011: 57). The ESP was set up by Laura Bates in 2012 as a response to her experiences of sexism and the common difficulty felt by many

women expressing experiences of sexism and inequality in various contexts of life. It uses an accessible platform for feminist organizing and represents a way in which contemporary feminism is being organized and taking new organizational forms (Walby, 2011).³ The website for the project enables individuals to anonymously post their experiences of sexism, and Twitter can also be used to share experiences. Users post according to country and there are 25 different countries represented on the site, including a refugee option. The ESP website prefaces the project by stating how difficult it is to talk about sexism and equality in modern society without being seen as overreacting or labelled negatively as ‘uptight’, a killjoy or a ‘militant feminist’. With this in mind, the ESP’s purpose is to amplify everyday experiences and to empower women to act against sexism, and the website has a wide platform as a result.⁴ Users can make use of a variety of tags: workplace, public space, home, public transport, school, university and media, or insert their own tag for their post. Bates created an accessible website because, as she stated, the problem of sexism could not be solved if people refused to believe the problem existed. When the site was launched, men and women were invited to post stories. Fifty thousand women added their stories in the first 18 months from different countries, across different ages, races, sexualities, gender identities, religions and disabilities (Bates, 2014a).

The ESP website displays the importance of infrapolitics for ‘nonhegemonic, contrapuntal, dissident, subversive discourse’ (Scott, 1990: 25) that involves ‘always pressing, testing, probing the boundaries of the permissible’ (Scott, 1990: 200). For feminist resistance, the ESP’s informal assemblages provide both a structure for the anonymous posts and therefore, through disguise, are an enabler of resistance. Disguise and infrapolitics that defy control and limit surveillance, and embodies a vitality that escapes ‘notice’ (even though personal experiences) become public. The ESP evades formal leadership and attempts to work outside it in a non-elitist way (although this aim has been critiqued).

Individuals and groups struggling for equality against neoliberal forces face increasing pressure (Fraser, 2013), and these demand different forms of organizing. Whilst the history and origins of feminist organizing are rooted in how women created organizations to challenge gendered power and to claim citizenship, Ewig and Feree (2013: 415) suggest that alliances are central to feminist organizing and are ‘primarily autonomous’ via women’s movements. Feminist solidarity involves organizing women to help themselves, their families and other women,⁵ although the exclusion of some women in social justice movements has raised intersectional concerns (Crenshaw, 1991).

In theories of feminist resistance there is a tendency to reproduce oppositional notions of public/private and visible/invisible spheres. For example, protest movements seek attention in the visible, public sphere, whereas lobbying activities that engage with the state are less visible (Walby, 2011). The feminist adage that the ‘personal is political’ continues to be powerful, and yet little consideration has been given to the ways in which public/private spaces represent flexible and fluid forms of personal resistance and whether this initiates or diminishes the empowerment of women at both individual and collective levels in and beyond formal organization. Coalitions and networks, such as the ESP, that coalesce around a struggle for feminist objectives and focus on collective action and consciousness-raising have increasing significance at a global level, and this is partly because ‘new political spaces are being used’ (Walby, 2011: 52). Laura Bates’

speech to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and celebrity-endorsed campaigns such as HeforShe initiated under the auspices of United Nations Women demonstrate how movements and initiatives are now operating in new political spaces. That said, feminist resistance is not without a backlash.⁶

The ESP organizes by categories of posts on the website, the largest number of entries being on harassment, assault and discrimination in the workplace (Bates, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). The project calls for a cultural and social shift in attitudes to women and violence against women, and adopts the perspective that we can all be part of the solution. Bates mobilizes the project in talks and interviews by drawing connections between the posts to incrementally build commonality and solidarity as resistance against sexism. Inspired by contemporary feminist theory, we propose that as a new form of infrapolitical feminist organizing, the ESP develops through affective solidarity (Hemmings, 2012), which is discussed next.

The ESP, narrating sexism and affective solidarity

The ESP makes evident how women take their experience of sexism to a public yet anonymous space to voice and record sexism and to connect with others with shared experiences. Such posts might otherwise be ignored or provide insufficient evidence for formal channels of complaint, although many of the website posts describe serious cases of harassment or assault. The importance of archiving sexism through individual posts is a pivotal claim for the ESP. Mohanty (1991: 33) articulates, of third world women's writing, that such life story-oriented written narratives are an 'important context in which to examine the development of political consciousness. Writing is itself an activity that is marked by class and ethnic positions. However, testimonials, life stories and oral histories are a significant mode of remembering and recording experience and feminist struggles' that create 'communal (feminist) political consciousness' and 'the redefinition of the very possibilities of political consciousness and action through the act of writing' (Mohanty, 1991: 35).

Mohanty's writing on the politics of feminism provides a precursor for the feminist politics of the ESP: naming inequalities, developing productive acts of resistance, and working with a particular ethics of care that infers that someone is listening and taking account of these stories. For us, women have an embodied connection through writing, especially during difficult times when financial support, for example, for women's health, shelter and safety, is being cut in developed countries. The ESP recognizes the wider, entrenched problem of sexism and starts with women's experiences, collecting them and acting upon them, and encourages women to speak out in an environment where there is much pressure to remain silent for fear of consequences. Our reading of the project aims suggests that they exemplify a desire, at least, to embrace difference and to coalesce multiple, intersectional concerns (Collins and Bilge, 2016). Thus, the ESP points to a moment in feminist activism where affective solidarity is pivotal.

Affect is a force that gives 'feminism its life' (Hemmings, 2012: 150) and, as Segal (2017) expresses, joy from feminist solidarity guards women from neoliberalism's attempt to individuate and isolate us. The concept of affective solidarity is, therefore, of great importance given the purpose of the ESP to build solidarity. Hemmings (2012: 150)

raises an inquiry on: ‘how we move from affective dissonance to affective solidarity ... particularly in terms of how we might move from individual experience to collective feminist capacity’. The ESP is a pertinent example of how a particular type of affective solidarity may be mobilized through negative affects. The point becomes how these individual experiences become a form of collective action and how they might help develop women’s solidarity that ‘draws on a broader range of affects – rage, frustration and the desire for connection – as necessary for a sustainable feminist politics of transformation, but that does not root these in identity or other group characteristics. Instead, affective solidarity is proposed as a way of focusing on modes of engagement that start from the affective dissonance that feminist politics necessarily begins from’ (Hemmings, 2012: 148). Bates’ experiences point to this:

eyes is the first step. Once we understand the scale and severity of the problem, we then have to act – and to see success we need to act together ... perpetrators of street harassment are often able to get away with it because others simply turn a blind eye ... To ignore what is happening is to be complicit, which perpetuates and exacerbates the problem by effectively telling harassers that they may act with impunity. (Bates, 2014a: 171; cf. Whitley and Page, 2015)

Although affects such as joy and passion are often positive forces behind feminism, Ahmed (2004a, 2004b) notably emphasizes the importance of rage for moving feminists, and cautions against ‘trying to domesticate feminist affect in the face of stereotyping feminists as angry and uncooperative’ (Hemmings, 2012: 150). Through Twitter, the ESP started a discussion for #ShoutingBack intended to document speaking out, naming, describing and thrusting the problem ‘in all its forms, into the limelight’ (Bates, 2014a: 169–170). This act of resistance ‘highlights the importance of feeling for others as a way of transforming ourselves and the world, and thus renders affect as a way of moving across ontology and epistemology’ (Hemmings, 2012: 148).

Hemmings (2012: 158) demonstrates how anger, frustration and rage are the core of transformation but are unstable entities whose impact cannot be controlled. These affects become a productive basis for solidarity, ‘not based in a shared identity or on a presumption about how the other feels, but on also feeling the desire for transformation out of the experience of discomfort, and against the odds’. Hemmings (2012: 158) goes on to write:

The affective dissonance, the judgement arising from the distinction between experience and the world, may be suppressed (it could be worse, remember), or the clarity it produces may be harnessed to foster advantages (if you continue to treat me like this, I will leave you), or it might be mobilized to justify lack of intersubjective care or withdrawal of labour.

Such an approach alerts us to the power of this sense of dissonance, that becomes a sense of injustice and desire to change how circumstances are experienced and understood, and enables individuals to narrate the world differently or become politicized through communities that value different ways of knowing. The heterogeneity and infrapolitical nature of women expressing their experiences in the public sphere (Lara, 1998) demonstrates the contestation and struggle in feminism essential for transformation (Martin, 1990), with women’s experiences and bodies at the heart of feminist organizing. Here, feminist resistance develops based on an embodied response to injustice (cf. Pullen

and Rhodes, 2014) and affective solidarity, which we suggest mobilizes experience and empathy in the struggle.

Studying the ESP

We were participants of the ESP prior to starting this research. The database of entries on the website contained over 100,000 entries in April 2015 (Sanghani, 2015), and thousands more have been posted since. Users can post on the website in different languages using flags of different countries to share nationally specific experiences. Our analysis of the ESP focused on the overarching aims and objectives of the project and the ways it mobilized feminist consciousness and solidarity. We also reviewed secondary data to augment our conceptual analysis, including: posts on the Everyday Sexism website, Bates' published book *Everyday Sexism* (Bates, 2014a), TEDx talks, and articles published in print media that signalled the momentum gained in the public sphere through the project's media presence (Kellaway, 2014). Our methodological approach had a dual purpose: first, reading participants' posts gave us a sense of 'the discursive landscape they inhabit: the resources and subject positions that shape their orientations to sexism' (Calder-Dawe and Gavey, 2016: 3). Second, we gained insight into how these experiences become mobilized and politicized in society by analysing representations in the media, thus exploring both individual and collective dimensions of the project.

Given the vast number of posts already collected as part of the project, the first stage involved reviewing posts from the website, focusing on the United Kingdom and using the rudimentary tag function on the website to filter by key words. The website itself is basic, and users are not easily able to search all posts for particular words. Our only option was to click on already existing tags provided on the site that filtered all posts with those tags. Therefore, we needed to find different ways of searching for key words, which are outlined below. Given the volume of entries and specificity of each experience our intent was not to generalize across all posts.

Focusing on website posts rather than Twitter gave users the opportunity to elaborate beyond a 140-character limit and, therefore, provided more detailed experiences. Over 500 posts were reviewed from the website and published book (Bates, 2014a). Rather than reviewing a period of time from the website that might reflect particular topics or issues of that moment, we analysed the posts using different search functions concentrating on the different website tags. As the largest categories of entries included sexism in the workplace (Bates, 2014b), we filtered by 'workplace' first, which provided an organizational focus, then 'university' and 'public space', both of which were popular tags. We also searched by keywords such as 'feminism', 'feminist' and 'discrimination', and manually searched for the use of these terms in one hundred pages of posts on the site.⁷

This exercise was intended to immerse ourselves in the posts and give us a sense of the breadth of experiences posted. All posts varied in length and level of detail. Whilst anonymized posts are subject to deep questioning, we took them to represent individual, subjective experiences of everyday sexism. The quotes were organized by tag and then formulated common themes related to the content of each post. This approach gave us a breadth of posts across the different tags available for users and allowed us to explore common themes across the different tags. Many posts were vivid and resonated with us. Posts were selected as exemplars and representative of a number of regular themes from

the posts we reviewed (see Appendix 1 for supplemental data of illustrative quotes and emerging themes, available online as supplementary material). Our analysis of the posts exemplifies two key issues: first, that individuals feel able and are compelled to share often deeply personal experiences, where the act of articulation is necessary in itself. Second, the ESP raises the question of whether a forum of this kind functions as a collective space of resistance. In the analysis presented in subsequent sections, posts are used to illustrate how the ESP was read as a space of feminist organizing and affective solidarity evident in our experience and reading of it. Our analysis was not intended to produce quasi-scientific claims to ‘truth’ that speak for individuals or groups but involved close reading of others’ experiences as well as their relationship with our own and analysing these connections with each other.

Feminist reflexive practice

The ESP is not an empirical object of enquiry but one that enables the development of a particular feminist reflexivity and subjectivity that is also politicized and embodied in us as women academics. Academic sexism is familiar.⁸ Our analysis of the material is based on reflexive openness and reading accounts of sexism as a space of feminist organizing that assembled the personal and institutional, in that sexism is referred to as something personal but is reproduced by institutions, as a habit or structure (Ahmed, 2015). We are both raising young children and share many of the same concerns about women in society. This article has enabled our agency as marked others, and has become transformative through the engagement we have had with one another. Lather (2001: 202) summarizes the process beautifully: to ‘throw ourselves against the stubborn materiality of others’ and our own practices of embodied knowledge production have been central to the ways in which theory and accounts of sexism surface.

Writing this article was painful and emotional, and at times our bodies could not contain the anger, frustration and desire for change. At times, it exposed our vulnerabilities and required an ethics of care. Our analysis is infused with identifying with many of the experiences we read and our own embodied knowledge of sexism. We have struggled with the materials and questioned the value of writing about sexism when it marks and devalues us institutionally. Nevertheless, we know that our experience and the experience of other women represented here matter. These reflections expose our own vulnerabilities and invoke what we see as an important and productive sense of unease – one that springboards the feminist politics we are advocating. Affective solidarity matters when we articulate sexism, and involves complex ethico-political processes of experience, reflexivity and empathy. In the next three sections our analysis of affective solidarity is developed as we draw on the ways in which experience and empathy are expressed and mobilized as ways of understanding the challenges of solidarity.

The ESP: The infrapolitics of affective solidarity

For seven months I worked in a research group at a UK university. The group consisted of just two members of staff, me and my manager. On my second day he shouted at me, telling me how stupid I was. Often he would sit next to me with his hand on my leg while we analysed data

together. Once I made a mistake in my experiment and he laughed, but clapped me on the back so hard that it hurt. I was very unwell at the time and felt unable to do anything about my manager's behaviour. I didn't know where to look for support from my department as I was very isolated from other staff and I knew that other staff had seen what was happening but not taken any action. I knew I needed a good reference from him to get another job. So I left, and pretended it was due to circumstances outside work. I was unemployed for two months while I found another job in a different city. I now work at the same university again, in a different research group, but I sometimes see him, and hide. I don't know what the right thing is to do. Confront him? Report him? Hope to successfully avoid him until he retires? If he sees me, be polite? Be honest? I don't know. I hope he isn't doing the same thing to anyone else. I don't want to endanger my position and relationships at my current job, and I am still ill, and feel I don't have the energy to take on the additional stress of making a formal complaint. (Website post, October 2017. Tags: university, workplace. Themes: discrimination, objectification, resignation)⁹

This opening quote illustrates that although sexism breeds vulnerability, fear and insecurity there is the struggle to find a space to speak out, to gain control and autonomy. This account resonated with us and evoked anger and frustration. It is not a ground-breaking claim that speaking out and documenting sexism give rise to affect from those who are most affected; however, it raises the dilemma of action and endangerment, of whether and how one (re)acts. Bates states:

If the everyday sexism project has shown anything it's that this is a continuum. All of these things are connected. The same ideas and attitudes about women that underlie those more 'minor' incidents of sexism and harassment that we are often told to brush off and not make a fuss about are the same ideas and attitudes about women that underlie the more 'serious' incidents of assault and rape. And what that means is that by helping to contribute to a cultural shift in the way women are perceived whether it's in the media, in the professional sphere, in the social or economic sphere we help to shift the way that they're perceived and treated in the other spheres as well so that does mean that every one of us can be part of the change. It's not necessarily about targeting perpetrators and it's certainly not about telling victims that they should be behaving in a certain way or reacting in a certain way. It's about the people in the office that made it difficult for that woman to feel able to speak out; it's about the people on that bus that day that looked out the window. So, be part of the change ... because our voices are loudest when we raise them together. (Bates, 2014b: from 14 mins)

Bates highlights how central affect is to resistance against sexism and fundamental for the development of grassroots solidarity, or a feminist infrapolitics. Certainly, solidarity built as affective responses takes on new forms upon entering the public arena, and becomes acts of feminist resistance. As well as the ESP posts, solidarity is bolstered by, and runs through, all of Bates' material, and in 2015 she jovially explained:

People tell me that women are their own worst enemy and what's really holding us back is how much we bitchy girls hate one another's success. Which is weird, because I'm supported by the most incredible people in the feminist community and never could have got *Everyday Sexism* off the ground without the support of an amazing group of volunteers. These women know the

power of humour in the face of trolling, and when humour fails, they know the power of gin. (Bates, 2015; see also Bates, 2017)

Whereas the website posts primarily focused on negative instances of sexism rather than positive occurrences of standing up to it, there are a number of examples that exemplify how women find strength to stand up to sexist acts by engaging with the ESP:

Today, as I googled Women's Day memes (it is on 9 August here in South Africa) the first things I saw, sadly, was funny memes making fun of women and Women's Day. I just finished reading the book *Everyday Sexism*, and despite finding it hard to read and saddening, the overall feeling I got was that women are strong and will no longer tolerate being stamped on, discriminated against, abused and ridiculed. Happy Women's Day to all you strong, beautiful women out there. Thank you for sharing your stories. Let us all remember how beautiful and resilient we are. Love each other as you should love yourself. (Website post, August 2016. Tag: media. Key themes: representation, solidarity, strength)

This post 'highlights the importance of feeling for others as a way of transforming ourselves and the world, and thus renders affect as a way of moving across ontology and epistemology' (Hemmings, 2012: 148), as discussed earlier. Speaking emotionally about the power of women, the author of the ESP post above speaks directly of love that creates community and solidarity. In this way, solidarity is an alternative to the resignation that many women expressed, as this post in the book *Everyday Sexism* summarized: 'It's amazing that many of us feel so resigned to something which if directed at any other group of people would be considered very offensive' (post cited in Bates, 2014a: 30).

Solidarity extended between women and some men in the material we explored. Men voiced their shock and outrage: 'Makes me realise as a man who hates this crap, how much more there is to do. We are the ones who can influence', and 'Definitely think the awareness is useful from a male point of view. Has definitely led to me thinking more about what I say and do' (anonymous posts quoted in Bates, 2014a: 170). The importance of male solidarity attempts to form an infrapolitics of inclusion and a focus on sharing in the ESP. Bates (2014a: 173) writes, 'the sense of solidarity that also comes with sharing stories can make a huge difference, because women no longer feel they're standing up to street harassment alone. One woman wrote to tell us how she was introduced to the project page by a friend and read reams of women's stories'.

As we have discussed, affective solidarity draws on rage and frustration as well as a desire for connection and is a means of engendering 'modes of engagement that start from the affective dissonance that feminist politics necessarily begins' (Hemmings, 2012: 148). We are mindful that sharing stories does not always invoke solidarity, as solidarity implies a shift from 'individual experience to collective feminist capacity' (Hemmings, 2012: 150). Affective solidarity may be mobilized by negative affects, but it can be said to multiply through the infrapolitical nature of the ESP; as the affective expression of sexism moves from private to public, the conditions for ethico-politics arise as wo/men have an ethical identification with others through the articulation of private experiences in a public domain. The next segment of a post reveals this:

... So I just go with it hoping that a lot more people will speak up about this!

Experiences sexual harassment at work too, a man in my team, constantly would say inappropriate things to me, and not just me, all women in the office, he never got in trouble for any of it, every time when you went close to him he'd touch your lower back or comment on your breasts, but he got away with it because it was just a 'banter' everywhere you go sexual harassment from men, if they sense you're getting upset they straight away say it's just a banter, or you don't understand jokes, can't have a laugh with you etc. THIS HAS TO STOP, I don't have enough years to write every single experience I've had, and I swear there's plenty more! Laura Bates, I have watched all your videos, I believe in you, and I am happy I've found you! Now what I know there's women out there who also fight for women and men being treated with respect, I feel like I can actually say something too, instead of ignoring people, I will actually stand up for myself, because I don't want to accept being sexually harassed, being disrespected or not given enough credit just because I am a woman, weaker, more vulnerable sex as people claim. (Website post, May 2017. Tags: home, public space, workplace. Themes: resistance, solidarity, speaking out)

Even though we are claiming that the affective conditions for speaking out and the ESP platform mobilizes a sense of affective solidarity, we are mindful not to universalize feminism (and feminist resistance) or individual experiences. We are also aware that as individual experience is mobilized publicly, inequalities emerge within such mobilization that add to the struggle of representing sexism collectively and simultaneously respecting contextualized, personal experience. In spite of these inequalities, this ethico-political struggle is exactly where feminist solidarity and resistance emerge through grassroots infrapolitics. Two modes of feminist organizing surface: the economy of empathy and the politics of experience, which give insight for developing feminist resistance and to which we now turn.

Economies of empathy

Sara Ahmed (2004b) writes that 'the politics of emotion creates social and cultural Others through the generation of affect and constitution of subjectivities' (cited in Phipps, 2016: 306). Empathy, as we experience it, surfaces throughout many of the ESP posts, most poignantly in stories tagged with 'public space' that detailed street harassment. Stories such as these were typical:

I hate everything about public transport, I just want to go to work without being glared at, poked, touched or pinched by someone I only see on this regular commute to work. I hate the fact I don't speak up because the train is normally quite busy and I don't want to 'cause a scene'. I'd go into details but I just don't have the willpower. (Website post, November 2016, Tag: no tag. Themes: public space, objectification, silencing)

The emotion conveyed in the post and our reading of it develops empathy that becomes a platform for ethico-politics, as discussed later. As readers of the ESP we were continually shocked by the sexual objectification of 'women in the workplace' tags: 'I was called a cum guzzler by a supervisor in an open office environment with my peers

present' (Website post, July 2017. Tag: workplace. Themes: sexualization, shame, empathy). When not sexualized, the only subjectivity available to women by their male colleagues was that of mother:

Our top boss, in a directors meeting where many females were present (including me). Top Boss explains why he will be trying to hire males only from now on. Than [*sic*] he looks at the female directors present and goes, 'Sorry ladies, but you know how it is, with the kids and everything'. They all smiled. They all have children 16 and above. I was appalled, of course, but said nothing. I was afraid for my job. And I wondered if they kept silent because they were in a position of power and had dealt with *ssh*les like Top Boss all their lives or if the [*sic*] were scared for their jobs just like me. And the entitlement. Top Boss felt secure enough in his position to say something like that and he knew we were going to keep our mouths shut. The humiliation. I felt like a piece of garbage after that meeting. Both because he made me feel like one (I am meant to reproduce and when I do – not even 'if' – I will be branded by society to make that child my sole focus. My partner? Bleh) and because of my attitude. (Website post, September 2016. Themes: empathy, insecurity, silence, workplace discrimination)

Other anonymous stories published in Bates (2014a: 165) detail the self-blame some women experience:

The annoying part about street harassment is the feeling that I should then change myself. I victim blame me. And it makes me feel so used up ... I'm tired of it. I'm 26 now and sometimes I hate myself so much.

The ways in which we empathize with the posts highlight the ways in which specific emotions of shame, anger and hate are produced by the institutions within which we are educated, live and work:

I hate feeling constantly scared outside and in my own home I hate that I can hardly out [*sic*] in words the things that happen because I immediately start questioning myself and wondering whether I was asking for it and knowing that if I said it to anyone in my family the first thing they will try to do is figure out how it could have been my fault. (Website post, July 2016. Tags: home, public space, public transport, workplace. Themes: fear, empathy, self-blame)

I'm 13. The first time I was catcalled I was 10. By age 12 I was raped for the first time. Consider that statement 'the first time' ... When standing waiting outside the movie theater waiting for a friend to come I find a hand grabbing my ass ... walking to ice cream a friend and I have to listen to vulgar comments our bodies. Our Bodies ... not theirs to touch to yell about to scrutinize to use. It is now that I am coming to realize I am a feminist. (Website post, July 2017. Tags: public space, school. Themes: empathy, feminism, resistance, speaking out)

These vivid posts, along with many others, reveal to us that emotions and affect not only drive the very act of speaking out but also create the possibilities for empathy in societies that reduce women's emotions to the individual. In other words, articulating sexism through the ESP defies the cultural conditioning of women's emotions. Bates (2015) touches on empathy and compassion from men in particular, in an interview:

One of the nicest surprises has been the compassionate responses from men. Many described their own experiences (like being ridiculed in the office for asking for parental leave). Others said their eyes had been opened, and shared their strategies for challenging sexism (from protesting about sexist chants at their local football club to lifting their own T-shirts when a woman in the street was told to 'get your tits out'). It's not about men against women, but people against prejudice.

Mobilizing men against prejudice is increasingly common, for example, as evident in the Male Champions of Change, a group of male CEOs promoting gender equality in Australia. Empathy becomes instrumental in speaking of the importance of equality in society and organizations. This said, we are reminded of the dangers of an instrumental approach to empathy because it 'is not boundless but, rather, always has a limit point, through which distinctions between subjects are inevitably redrawn' (Hemmings, 2011; Pedwell, 2012b: 166). Developing this idea raises the question of whether 'empathy is more likely to remain the purview of those who are already socially privileged' (Pedwell, 2012a; 2012b: 166), thereby extending the axes of oppression. More critically, drawing on Ahmed, Pedwell suggests that "empathy sustains that very difference that it may seek to overcome" when subjects assume that they can feel what another feels in ways that fail to take account of differences in history, power, and experience' (Ahmed, 2004b: 29, cited in Pedwell, 2012a: 283). These differences manifest throughout many different social movements, and between intersectional feminists (Crenshaw, 1991). Whilst some feminists are critical of empathy because it is emotionally charged as unquestioningly 'good', there is also potential for 'how theories of empathy premised on proximity and intimacy negotiate the complex problem of "the distant other"' (Pedwell, 2012b: 164). In the unequal structural and cultural relations of neoliberalism, these may be useful for working towards social justice for the cumulative effect of everyday sexism across different groups. The potential for understanding how empathy might aid our experience of, and resistance against, sexism as racialized, classed and sexed in the ESP needs reflection to account for the struggles between different women, where the struggle conditions the politics for change and rests on politicizing women's experience of sexism. However, we are careful not to universalize the ESP, and need to acknowledge these distinctions in a sustained and meaningful way.

Politicizing experience

As introduced earlier, ethico-politics surfaces when affect including empathy and experience come together. Drawing on Alison Phipps, the politics of experience witnessed in the ESP is employed in different ways, and this raises a number of interesting issues for understanding the political potential for feminist resistance and transformation. We support Munro's (2013) observations that the internet plays a key role in fourth-wave feminism, and online spaces can be 'an antidote to the invisibility and silencing which characterize oppressions based on race, class and gender' (Phipps, 2016: 305). The politics of experience surfaces between the private and the opportunity to make experience public and render it visible. The essence of the ESP is about drawing on individual experiences and, although they cannot do justice to the variety of the experiences posted, a

large proportion of the posts we reviewed drew on individual experiences and observations but did not necessarily mention race, sexuality or class, for example.

Although the ESP shows how the personal becomes political, Phipps (2016: 303) asks us to reflect on whose personal is more political in discussing the role of experience in a neoliberal context. Specifically, Phipps focuses on how first-person narrative ‘operates as a form of capital within abstracted and decontextualized debates which entrench existing power relations’ (Phipps, 2016: 303). We agree with Phipps (2016: 306) that, whilst experience can be suffused with emotion/affect, it is not reducible to either and thus needs to be differentiated from them. Phipps (2016: 303) reminds us of being critical of how the personal and emotional is commodified, and illustrates how:

. . . the use of the experiential as capital both reflects and perpetuates the neoliberal invisibilization of structural dynamics: it situates all experiences as equal, and in the process fortifies existing inequalities. This competitive discursive field is polarizing, and creates selective empathies through which we tend to discredit others’ realities instead of engaging with their politics.

These politics are exemplified in a post, where a younger woman is denigrated for being feminist:

My mom bought be [*sic*] a Feminist sweatshirt for Christmas and a couple of days ago I put it on because I wanted to show the world that I am proud that I am a feminist and that it isn’t a dirty word and that everyone should be feminists. When I went to school I got multiple comments from boys asking if I was a lesbian. Screaming at me saying I’m ‘anti-men’. Telling me that my sweatshirt was controversial and that I should take it off. When I got home from school my dad yelled at me and told me to ‘take the damn thing off’. (Website post, 2 June 2017. No tag. Themes: experience, feminism)

The ESP aims to provide a place to log experiences and render them visible and important, and to amplify voices (Bates, 2014a: 7). These voices can be amplified in different ways. The experiences of workplace discrimination, especially with regard to promotion and pregnancy, were rife in the ESP posts and speak to the normalization of sexism and discrimination. There was emotional intensity and desperation in these women’s experiences, and they invoked fear and vulnerability that fortified existing inequalities:

Board member in my office: ‘how’s my little staff girl doing?’ Same board member at an event: ‘it’s okay about your tits—I’m an ass man.’ Another board member: ‘how’d a pretty girl like you get so smart?’ Another board member, ‘I actually like that you’re so outspoken.’ Another board member: ‘just type this up for me.’ Sign on my way to work: ‘real men vote for Trump.’ Bumper sticker on the car in front of me: ‘don’t be sexist—broads hate that!’ At the supermarket, ‘gimme a smile, baby.’ In the parking lot, ‘move it, you fat bitch.’ New stories every day, every day, every day. (Website post, April 2017. Tags: everywhere, public space, workplace. Themes: bodies, experience, resignation)

During a meeting about my prospects for promotion at work, one of the first things mentioned by my boss was that I had newly married and would probably be ‘popping out a baby soon’. (Website post, April 2017. Tag: workplace. Themes: discrimination, experience, pregnancy)

The decontextualized and anonymized narratives draw on a cumulative effect of experience; however, what happens to experiences when they are taken from the bodies and contexts that experience them? Phipps (2016) usefully focuses on what experience *does*. In this sense, the ESP provides an interesting but not necessarily entirely positive moment for feminism, where narratives are not tied to individual bodies or contexts but enjoy a life in an online world that has, in part, been stripped of its messiness as intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) and risks reproducing a ‘false universalism of “women’s experience”’ (Phipps, 2016: 305). It is not surprising that movements such as the ESP attempt to be as inclusive as possible and as a result secure public support, celebrity endorsement and alignment with corporate sponsored campaigns (such as Gucci’s Chime for Change). However, this popularity might also diminish its political potential as individuals may not identify with these alignments.

We have witnessed that ‘The institutionalisation of the politics of the personal prompted challenges from those relegated to the margins’ (Phipps, 2016: 305). If all experiences are valid, they are also asymmetrically situated, and ‘the injuries felt by those who are more privileged, while certainly painful, are not commensurate with the experience of oppression’ (Phipps, 2016: 315). The ESP demonstrates the tension between leaving behind particular identity politics and the problematic of a universal feminist politics. Phipps (2016: 306) makes the incisive point that ‘experiences are “invested” into feminist politics, often as part of battles for epistemic privilege or political gain. As part of this process, some “personals” become more important politically than others’. Experience operates as epistemology and politics, where a diversity of stories and oppressions might be made visible, ‘it tended to reify personal narrative as the origin of explanation, in the process dehistoricising it and essentialising identities’ (Phipps, 2016: 306–307). A more critical perspective might suggest that the popular appeal of the ESP is mobilized by having a blonde-haired, well-educated, eloquent woman as its spokesperson. Posts on the website outline common frustrations about marketing for women, and some noted experiences of misandry, alongside serious violations of women’s bodies that constitute assault and harassment. These experiences are arguably dehistoricized, and risk reinforcing rather than contesting ideological systems given that women’s experiences do not automatically equal feminist politics (Scott, 1991) and that ‘experience must be grounded in an understanding of structural conditions in order to produce an emancipatory commitment’ (Hemmings, 2012; Phipps, 2016: 315). Having explored empathy and the contradictions in how experience is mobilized, we turn to further develop the feminist infrapolitics of everyday sexism.

Discussion

If you have more power, remember to listen as much as you talk. And if you have less power remember, to talk as much as you listen. That can be hard when you’re used to hiding. Keep yourself in the present, and don’t obsess over what you *should* be doing, or *could* have done differently. Talk to people, don’t get isolated, and remember to empathize, because almost everybody can be changed and transformed. (Steinem, 2017)

We will not be silenced. We are organized. We are ready to bring our collective power. (Women’s March, 2018)

The motivation of this article has been to surface the silencing of sexism, and to contest the normalization of sexism in organizations, including academic institutions. The rise of multiple feminist movements teaches us a great deal about the power of feminist organizing and resistance. Attesting to that teaching we have considered the idea of feminist infrapolitics and used it to illustrate the ways in which resistance emerged in one particular contextualized setting, the online feminist movement: the ESP. We introduced certain strains of contemporary feminist theory as they relate to affective solidarity by analysing the ways in which women (and some men) cultivate a sense of togetherness and collective support that marks feminist infrapolitics. This solidarity, as a contemporary example of that which has been witnessed throughout feminism's long history, manifests struggle, action and feminist community-building for specific social change against the debilitating effects of patriarchy, misogyny and sexism.

Feminism, and the language and media associated with it, has changed, and the ESP is an example of the internet becoming an important space for feminist activists (Munro, 2013). The ESP archives sexism (Ahmed, 2015) and, as well as demonstrating the power of feminist writing (Mohanty, 1991), it points to a moment in feminist activism where affective solidarity is significant by testifying against sexism as a means to unite women and their embodied experiences of discrimination and abuse. The ESP names inequalities, produces resistance and is a site that cares to listen and take account of experiences that are both mundane and significant. Walby (2011: 57) asks 'whether or not the institutionalisation of fluid grassroots feminism is likely to advance the position of women', but our article suggests that the systemic, entrenched and institutionalized nature of sexism is so widespread that resistance towards sexism commences with 'small' accounts of sexism. The ESP demonstrates a growing commitment to tackling inequality by recording women's experiences, mobilizing consciousness-raising, and engendering solidarity. Furthermore, the ESP declares the moral and political deliberations of men and women.

Thus, we question whether (some) women are more empowered and feel a sense of community in such a grassroots movement through their embodied, reflexive responses or whether only certain women are represented. For many, the act of posting on a website may be cathartic, enabling them to go on with their daily lives without changing those lives in any practical or substantive manner. Nevertheless, posting could depoliticize acts of sexism and discrimination when what is needed is for rage and affective dissonance to prompt practical action. There is a tension over whether lives change as a result of this movement, and if so, whose and how. Phipps (2016: 315) puts it eloquently:

Ventriloquising another's personal story is an act of power, especially when the oppression of this Other is wielded against another Other with whom one disagrees. Disclosing one's experience of violence in a bid to construct and exclude the Other is violence in itself. Especially when personal stories become capital in political debates, they must be understood in relation to dynamics of privilege and marginality; these also grant the advantaged few more access to narrative platforms than the rest. There is a fine line to walk between engaging in selective empathies, and situating experiences structurally/appraising the uses to which they are put.

The ESP reveals the conflicts between public/private, visible/invisible spaces for women's resistance and the struggles that these dichotomies yield in relation to collective

organization and action. This public/private space represents flexible and fluid forms of individual resistance that become collectively organized, but to what effect? We are mindful of whether simply accounting for sexism may risk the further normalization of practices that increase the visibility of issues yet simultaneously limit women's potential for change.

Given the policing of feminism and affective solidarity that is part and parcel of neoliberalism, we write against the times in which we live, as neoliberal rationality works to 'atomise' (Rottenberg, 2017, 2018) women. Advocating connection, community and solidarity presents challenges, but it is exactly these challenges that stress the importance of solidarity, especially in building feminist communities that incorporate diverse voices. Affective solidarity provides help and support for those women affected by sexism but also works to garner the backing of those privileged enough to escape such violence and to engage their help in the fight against sexism. Ours is not a utopian vision but a practical one that involves struggle. Such struggle has manifest throughout feminist history and theory, as well as through the women's posts in the ESP.

Hemmings (2012) positions embodied knowledge at the heart of affective solidarity, and following her lead we take this solidarity as a feminist infrapolitics that provides the ethico-political moment and rupture required as a prolegomenon for transformational change. The ESP illustrates a simple yet highly organized feminist infrapolitics, and mobilizes experience and empathy in both theory and practice. It provides the structural means for affective solidarity, and as Hemmings, Ahmed and others have taught us, affect is what sustains feminism. Although affective solidarity cannot change the world by itself, it demonstrates a shift in the ways women are organizing and resisting sexism. This offers a means of feminist politicization through affective dissonance where 'that sense of dissonance might become a sense of injustice and then a desire to rectify that' (Hemmings, 2012: 157). Highlighted here is the relationship between emotion and power such that sexist discrimination, oppression and violence is enacted at an affective level (Lorde, 1984) so as to shape individual and social bodies (Ahmed, 2000).

Instead of reinforcing patriarchal culture by confining our analysis of feminist resistance *against* patriarchy, we have challenged women's positions of subordination as marginalized or silenced (Ahmed, 2000) such that we might break from the social norms that keep inequality in place. Resistance against sexism demands fully acknowledging widespread misogyny (Bates, 2018). Infrapolitics has been brought to this article as a way to think about collective resistance and its connections with solidarity. The ethico-political implications of the ESP 'where ethics is mobilized into action creates a politics directed by ethics' (Pullen and Rhodes, 2014: 788) is one where feminist resistance and organizing through grassroots infrapolitics – or what we propose as feminist infrapolitics – provides fertile ground for action mobilized by the ethico-political. This starts from the bodies of those violated by sexism, discrimination and harassment. Rosalyn Diprose reminds us that this is a 'politics of generosity [that] begins with all of us, it begins and remains in trouble, and it begins with the act' (Diprose, 2002: 188). Our analysis of solidarity centres the body as the site of action and resistance – a 'passionate politics' that works through affective solidarity 'for a justice that is yet to arrive' (Diprose, 2002: 194). Politics in the form of feminist activism invites ethics, and in turn this ethics gives rise to politics. The politics of experience and economies of empathy are significant. Social

movements such as the ESP have the potential to *disrupt* the taken for granted means through which sexism manifests and becomes normalized. Diprose locates the ‘body as the site of one’s habitat or subjectivity – where the body is constituted by a dynamic relation with other bodies in a social context of power, desire and knowledge’ (Diprose, 1991: 66). Accordingly, the potential for change starts by questioning ‘how one’s embodied ethos is constituted by social discourses and practices including ethics and how one’s identity is constituted in relation to others’ (Diprose, 1994: ix). Thinking in this way changes the conditions that women engage with sexism, rendering it no longer reproduced by women working within (or even against) masculine constructions or a denigrated and subordinated femininity. We have in place a move towards mobilizing resistance against the very normalization of sexism.

Once again, we are reflexive about not co-opting others within our proposal for an infrapolitics of affective solidarity – one that would render the Other entirely knowable and fully accomplished (Diprose, 2002). Similarly, we do not advocate for a particular type of feminism or wave but rather wish to create a dialogue in the hope that those reading this article will engage in considering the collective struggle that we are all a part of. This relies on an openness and reciprocity between many different women and men to enable much needed conversations and engagements to start. Moreover, ‘marginal subjects produce different, more reliable, knowledge because of conditions of inequality that mean they (have to) know dominant frames of legitimation in order to survive or thrive, and generate local knowledges for the same reason’ (Hemmings, 2012: 155). Without such inclusion, those privileged do not reflect on their hierarchical power or the oppression of different groups. The result would be that the conditions of collective solidarity are precluded. In response, it is necessary that reciprocity be built into relations of solidarity (cf. Dean, 1996).

In 1986, Nancy Fraser claimed that an ‘ethic of solidarity is superior to an ethic of care as a political ethic’ (Fraser, 1986: 428). With this claim, Fraser sets the ground for the interrelationship and interdependency of ethics and politics, and draws attention to the power of the collective struggles of women. The ESP shows these collective struggles and illustrates the norms of collective solidarities, to speak, to be heard, to tell experiences and to have voice. In this way, the ESP demonstrates that ‘an ethic of solidarity elaborated from the standpoint of the collective concrete other is more appropriate than an ethics of care for a feminist ethics, if we think of a feminist ethics as the ethics of a social and political movement’ (Fraser, 1986: 429).

Continued feminist infrapolitics and activism depends on the engagements of women across the racial, ethnic and class distinctions that would divide us. Against such divisions, we suggest that attention is turned away from ethical identification with others towards ethics that emerge infrapolitically between affective bodies and that make available the circumstances for the preconditions of politics. This article has turned to the role of affective solidarity within feminist infrapolitics that invokes a commitment to cultivating *social sensitivity* (Medina, 2013). Feminist organizing demands forms of resistance that surface as embodied, reflexive acts to developing social sensibility and epistemic resistance (Medina, 2013; see also Fricker, 2007). Insensitivity involves ‘being cognitively and affectively numbed to the lives of others; being inattentive to and unconcerned by their experiences, problems, and aspirations; and being unable to connect with them and to understand

their speech and action' (Medina, 2013: xi). Such insensitivity, and what Medina terms 'active ignorance', prevents us from developing new ways of organizing resistance. Practices of feminist infrapolitics require cultivation to enable us to fully understand exclusion, and to become sensitive to it. However, they also require a commitment to politics practised through both personal and collective resistance. This is echoed by Bates' (2014a: 7) hope that such a project will render women visible and, therefore, important. Cultivating social sensitivity is a way of becoming attuned to injustice, and enables the injustices created by sexism or racism, privilege and oppression to be addressed.

Given the central importance of connection and accountability between people, feminist infrapolitics and affective solidarity that embeds 'enlarged sympathy' could leverage grassroots organizing towards a broader mass movement. This idea of enlarged sympathy, from Brenda Lyshaug, refers to the 'attitudes and dispositions that would-be-allies must cultivate if they are to establish nonrepressive and mutually affirming political connections across difference' (Lyshaug, 2006: 99). These relations encourage 'a sense of kinship with others' – one that is 'forged not through bracketing out others' differences but through absorbing and locating an "echo" of those differences within oneself' (Lyshaug, 2006: 99). The cultivation of others in infrapolitics recognizes that these others are shifting and expanding, for example as men join the ESP and call out misogyny.

In closing, we may well ask whether this article itself constitutes an infrapolitics? We can only wait to see what becomes of this article in the future, but the seeds planted here could develop future research that focuses on building platforms for action, learning from feminist organizations and developing new ways of working in the academy. Informed by and practising feminist reflexivity, we have analysed how the ESP provides particular insights into affective solidarity, the politics of experience and empathy, but also has limits in how these are expressed as universal concerns. Such politics address sexism through the transformational potential of feminism, so as to raise the future-orientated question: Where will women be without feminism?

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Notes

- 1 The online presence of these movements can be found at: MeToo – <https://metoomvmt.org/>; One Million Women – <http://www.millionwomenrise.com/>; Women's March – <https://www.womensmarch.com/>. In addition, *Time* magazine named a group of women 'Person of

the Year' in 2017 for speaking out against harassment and violence against women. These 'Silence Breakers' included #MeToo founder Tarana Burke.

- 2 There are a number of recent developments that highlight the development and critique of feminist solidarity through neoliberal feminism and the ensuing backlash that we are unable to explore in the space of one article. Briefly, despite the appearance of solidarity, there are counter-arguments such as Rottenberg's (2017) question: 'Can #MeToo go beyond white neoliberal feminism?' because it does not recognize the low socio-economic status of women being more prone to harassment and abuse (Rottenberg, 2017), incarcerated women, or address the individualized priorities of privileged women speaking out. It might even be that neoliberal feminism has thrived on shaming women to stay silent, fixing themselves rather than working collectively to address institutional and structural sexism and harassment in organizations. Windham (2017: np) comments that effective social movements that address workplace sexual harassment 'must broaden to include women of all backgrounds and should channel the outrage into organizational and legal transformation'. A key criticism of the #MeToo movement has been that whilst it may create awareness it does not produce the tools for dialogue and reflection (Munar, 2018).
- 3 For the ESP, social media is an integral platform from which the project has expanded and grown since its inception. Bryman (2016: 558) comments that social media research:

. . . is an area that is in its infancy and which has tended to be associated with the examination of so-called "Big Data" ... a major challenge is likely to be how to sample from the vast array of possible documents.

Whilst the use and efficacy of social media for online activism and resistance is worthy of critical discussion, it is one we can only briefly explore in the scope of this article.

- 4 See also the description and values of the project: <http://everydaysexism.com/about>. Bates studied English Literature at Cambridge University, and worked as an actor and nanny, where her experiences inspired the project. The project has inspired individuals, such as a law student in India, to set up a blog where individuals can email their stories of sexism (see <http://every-sexism.blogspot.co.uk/2015/06/>), a website dedicated to women in STEM subjects (<https://stemfeminist.com/>), as well as related Twitter accounts dedicated to experiences in media, and in various countries such as Canada, Gibraltar, Greece, Iran and South Africa, to name a handful.
- 5 'Lifting as we climb' was the phrase popularized by the black women's club movement in the United States (Ewig and Feree, 2013).
- 6 Bates describes being trolled on the internet, which she says exemplifies just how necessary the project is, stating:


And this is what I got, not twice a day but up to 200 times a day just for speaking out ... the fact that it was so scary for some people, for somebody just to want to talk about equality, just to want to raise women's voices and give their stories a platform that they had to tell me exactly how they wanted to disembowel me and with exactly which weapons and in what order and not just that I should be raped but exactly how I should be raped and in which orifices and where and when. (Bates, 2014b: from 9 mins; Bates, 2017)

- 7 Bryman (2016) outlines forms of analysis such as qualitative content analysis and ethnographic content analysis which might be suitable for virtual documents and social media

research. However, these methods of analysis did not fit our purposes as the study did not intend to provide a discursive analysis of the types of stories or storytelling involved. The variety and volume of posts meant it would be impossible to provide an in-depth, meaningful qualitative analysis of data in the space of one article, given their anonymity and lack of context.

- 8 From citational practices to all-male panels, the marginalization of feminist debates in mainstream journals, or the violence feminist organization scholars may incite on one another, the importance of the sexism archive (Ahmed, 2015) shines a light on how sexism pervades the academy. The archive is full; we have been worn down by the everyday labour required to fight, but we have to continue to make this sexism material, to show how we are marked by sexism. We are marked by the ink on our reviews, the criticisms from our appraisals or the persistent need to mould ourselves into the right kind of femininity to be an academic.
- 9 ESP posts are quoted with the date and tags used in the post. In addition, we identify key themes related to our analysis of each post. Grammatical errors remain in the original quotes to preserve the voices and embodied experiences of participants.

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