

The challenges and outcomes of critical diversity scholarship

Introduction

With the institutionalization of diversity research in organization studies, diversity scholarship has become increasingly varied over the past two decades (Prasad *et al.*, 2005). From a starting point of positivist and managerialist approaches (Prasad and Mills, 1997), the field has expanded to include subjectivist and inter-subjectivist approaches (Cunliffe, 2011), with associated methods, epistemologies and ontological understandings (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). Examples can be found across the range of approaches and frameworks, including feminist, poststructuralist, interpretivist, symbolic interactionist, post-colonialist (Nkomo, 2011), relational constructionism, post-qualitative (Lather and St Pierre, 2013) and reflexive dialogism (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011) – most of which would be included under the umbrella of critical approaches to the study of management and organization (Bendl *et al.*, 2016). These critical approaches provide thought-provoking insights, and seek to problematize much of diversity-related initiatives and research as polarizing; stereotyping; and essentialist in their composite construction of differences. It thus has also become evident from a critical perspective that empirical work in diversity scholarship requires attention to intersectionality (McCall, 2005), bodily matters and the materiality of language (MacLure, 2013) as well as identity formation processes of the participants and researchers during the research process (Booyesen *et al.*, 2018)

While this has broadened the discussion in the field it has also – as the recent debates around intersectionality, identity formation and theorization of power have shown – created some confusions about how to undertake critical diversity research (Zanoni *et al.*, 2010). This urges critical diversity scholars to re-visit existing approaches or paradigms (belief systems that guides our thoughts and practices), and methods, and even re-invent novel ways of inquiry into diversity issues. This is why the aim of this Special QROM Edition is to explore these challenges and the outcomes of approaches and methods in critical diversity scholarship.

Beginning the conversation

With this introductory paper to our special edition we want to enter the qualitative research conversation on multiple levels. Because critical diversity scholarship is not exempt from the larger (grand) debates in qualitative research we start our discussion on a general level, before moving into qualitative diversity research challenges.

First we reflect on the status of the qualitative turn in research (Gobo, 2015; Giddings, 2006; Hervieux, 2016) and the proliferation of qualitative methods (Duberley, 2015). We question whether this turn has indeed been fully made, based on the socio-politics of research privileging quantitative research (Mills, 2015; Bazeley, 2016). We explore the extent to which qualitative research is turning on itself, noticeably in the re-turn of mixed methods, emergence of merged methods and methodological pluralism (Gobo, 2015, 2016; Hervieux, 2016) a simplistic distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods (Bryman *et al.*, 2011; Hayes *et al.*, 2016), and lastly, the problematization of the term “qualitative” research



and calls for the term to be expunged (Gobo, 2016, Giddings, 2006; Mills, 2015; Pringle and Booysen, 2018).

Second we reflect on qualitative research integrity, with a specific reference to critical diversity research. We reiterate objectivity as both a myth and a fantasy, and emphasize the inevitability of intersubjectivities in research (Cunliffe, 2011). We discuss the notion of multiple reflexive subjectivities at play in research (Hayes *et al.*, 2016), and draw attention to the intersectional and fluid nature of identities of the researcher(s) and the researched (Booyesen, 2018; Atewologun *et al.*, 2016; Hayes *et al.*, 2016), which underscore the importance of acknowledging the principles of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) and the need for positionality clarification, subjectivity claiming and critical reflexivity in our research (Cunliffe, 2011; Pringle and Booysen, 2018).

Lastly, we reflect on the contribution of this special issue, and the way forward in dealing with the challenges of critical diversity scholarship. We highlight the potential of mindfully selected methodological pluralism, and the strength of creating new methods (Hayes *et al.*, 2016, Johnson, 2015), to expand the field of critical diversity scholarship. We also emphasize the importance of practicality and practical applicability of qualitative research alongside its scientific value, which asks for critical reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2011), creative imagination (Gabriel, 2015), attention to production and re-production of power dynamics in sociopolitical-historical contexts (Gerrard *et al.*, 2017), and practical engagement with the world (Lather, 2016; Pullen *et al.*, 2017), in order to span the scholarship-practice divide (Bansal *et al.*, 2012), and to keep critical diversity scholarship relevant, vibrant and worthy of the complexity it deals with.

The qualitative turn [...] turning on itself?

We recognize that qualitative research is not nascent anymore, that it has matured as a field, and that there is a notable proliferation of qualitative methods (Bryman *et al.*, 2011). We also observed the rise of the “qualitative turn” (Gobo, 2015) and acknowledge that huge inroads have been made in establishing qualitative research in diversity scholarship. However, we disagree with Gobo (2015) that qualitative methods have become mainstream. We agree with Hervieux (2016) that the mainstream nature of quantitative research is very much alive and remains the dominant choice in research published in most first and second tier publications on work, organizations and diversity scholarship. As Hervieux (2016) argues, there is still very much a lack of an equal balance between quantitative and qualitative research:

I argue that quantitative methods will no longer be mainstream when there will be an equal balance of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in fields of research that are considered mature; such as can be found in the Journal of Management; and when mature fields dominated by qualitative methods will be just as frequent as those dominated by quantitative methods; and none will question the fields maturity. Of course, we are far from this. (p. 196)

Mixed, merged and emergent methods, and methodological pluralism?

The use of mixed methods not only constitutes one of the most important contemporary trends in organization studies (Gobo, 2015; Booysen *et al.*, 2018), it has also elicited scholarly debate around different paradigmatic approaches (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Corman and Poole, 2000; Hassard and Cox, 2013), which has led to questioning of the notion of “mixed methods” when referring to paradigmatically commensurate approaches, e.g., positivist quantitative methods and positivist qualitative methods (Bryman *et al.*, 2011). This questioning has been strengthened in recent years through increasing contrasts between positivist and anti-positivist (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), post-positivist (Miller, 2000) and postpositivist research (Prasad, 2005). For Burrell and Morgan (1979) positivist research

adopts an objectivist approach that treats studies of social life much in the way as natural science treats non-human phenomena (e.g. plants, insects, etc.) Anti-positivism, on the other hand, refers to interpretivist accounts that are grounded in subjectivism with a focus on the social construction of reality. In an attempt to bridge the gap between positivist and anti-positivist approaches, Miller (2000) and others have introduced the notion of the post-positivist approach, which refers to a more reflexive examination of social life through consideration of the influence of subjectivity on objectively established phenomena. Prasad (2005), meantime, sees postpositivism as grouping together:

[...] a disparate number of 'intellectual traditions' that share a common rejection of fundamental tenets of positivism – especially the insistence on emulating the natural sciences in the study of human society and its characterization as a unified scientific community or practice. (Bryman *et al.*, 2011, p. 58)

Prasad (2005, p. 9) argues that the different genres of research “share a common reaction to positivism in questioning ‘social reality and knowledge production from a more problematized vantage point, emphasizing the constructed nature of social reality, the constitutive role of language, and the value of research as critique’” (Prasad, 2005, p. 9, cited in Bryman *et al.*, 2011, pp. 57-58).

A simplistic distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods

By focusing on paradigmatic differences scholars have drawn attention to the problem of assigning (all) qualitative research to a paradigm that stands in contrast to (all) quantitative research but treating them, nonetheless, as commensurate for the purpose of producing triangulated data (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). The problem has been exacerbated by focusing on social change as a vitally important element of the constitution of a given paradigm (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), but also on the proliferation of critical approaches to management and organizational studies. Burrell and Morgan (1979), for instance, used an axis of radical change vs regulation to distinguish between those theories that seek to radically change social life and those that seek to reproduce the status quo. The result was, in part, that this obfuscates methodological differences by assigning apparently different forms of objectivism and realism to the radical structuralist paradigm in contrast to the functionalist paradigm. Similarly, the subjectivism of interpretivism is radically different from that of radical humanism. Since the original publication of Burrell and Morgan (1979) a number of critical approaches have proliferated that do not fit so easily within the two-by-two matrix. Critical Race Theory, Feminism[1], Postcolonial Theory, Poststructuralism, Critical Realism and Actor-network theory are several examples of approaches that arguably cross different paradigms – blurring the now outmoded and overly simplistic distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods (Bryman *et al.*, 2011).

This opens possibilities of paradigmatically mixed methods (e.g. using postpositivist and positivist methods together – Hassard and Cox, 2010). Thus, while we agree with Duberley (2015, p. 340) that we need “to re-emphasize the link between epistemology and methodology and recognize that different knowledge-constituting assumptions can underpin what might on the surface seem to be very similar methodologies,” we also want to advocate for merging methods in a bricolage, and mixing of methods in line with Gobo (2015), and creating new methods (Pritchard, 2015), and mindfully selecting methodological pluralism (Hayes *et al.*, 2016, p. 131). In short, we are advocating, paradoxically, for a postpositivist stance to ‘mixed methods’. This would involve, to begin with, a shift in terminology from mixed methods (and its suggestion of incommensurate methodologies) to triangulation (Guba and Lincoln, 2005), with its focus on difference stances. Our reference to an ordering, or meta, “postpositivism stance” (a main standpoint) is to draw on the spirit of postpositivism which contends that there are various aspects, levels and phenomena involved in the social construction of knowledge, while being mindful of the seeming paradigmatic rigidity of some methods (e.g. grounded theory).

Problematization of the term qualitative research

Giddings (2006) problematizes the term qualitative research, arguing it has become simultaneously fashionable and misleading, as it has become a “catch-all” for non-positivist inquiry” (p. 199). The broad use of the label of qualitative research prevents researchers from a more subtle and sharper exploration of the diverse epistemological and methodological problems of doing research. Gobo (2015, 2016) argues that the binary distinction between qualitative and quantitative research encourages an unacceptable dichotomy that contributed to the so called “paradigm wars” (Aldrich, 1998) and minimizes the more nuanced and sharper exploration of diversity in methods.

Qualitative research integrity

We emphasize how important reflection on our own role as researcher is for research integrity. Gabriel (2015) points out that over the past decade the “standard qualitative doctoral thesis” has become a certain trend in qualitative research in organizations and management, now often being the starting point of an academic career, the inspiration for innumerable qualitative articles published jointly by younger scholars and their supervisors the exemplar for qualitative research against which other outputs are frequently measured” (Gabriel, 2015, p. 332). This “standard” of course aligns with Denzin and Lincoln’s (2018) so called “fractured future” (2005–2017) that marked the eighth moment in qualitative research, where qualitative inquiry is confronted to align more closely with contemporary positivistic orientations. It is, however, our contention that we need to critically reflect upon the reification of such a standard qualitative doctoral thesis by our every day practices as scholars, authors, reviewers and editors, and standardization and neo-positivist influences on qualitative research. The question we want to ask is to what extent such a standard becomes restrictive, normative and exclusionary and thus detrimental and suffocating to the growth of the field? Researcher integrity is under pressure if we base our choice for a research design, data collection and analysis on the opportunities to publish in top tier journals rather than on our beliefs regarding “the ‘best’ way to explore the what we want to research” (Hayes *et al.*, 2016, p. 130). The field may call for clearly defined research questions, processes and outcomes, while our research integrity is better suited by expressing and reifying our position as a researcher and our epistemological and ontological background (Hayes *et al.*, 2016).

Reflection on our role as researchers calls for reconstruction of the myth that research can produce objective knowledge. Essentially, we contend, we are subjectively involved in the research process and we cannot be objective or separate ourselves from our social reality. We are embedded in the world, not removed from it, we influence the world and the world influences us. We as researchers cannot be divorced from our background, social identities and or earlier knowledge. The consequence is that we have to recognize how our background shapes who we are now as a researcher and that we take earlier knowledge with us during the research process. We plea for recognizing our subjective involvement in the research process, articulating upon it in our research reporting and reflecting upon its meaning for the knowledge we derive. The same goes for those we research – the above influences are reciprocal, and bring multiple subjectivities into the research process.

Multiple reflexive subjectivities at play

One of the hallmarks of qualitative reach is to reflect on and to interrogate our research practice, i.e. to examine critically the assumptions underlying our actions and the impact of those actions on others (Cunliffe, 2004). This means we as researchers should question not only what we assume to know about our research topic as well as what we feel during the process. This reflection should move beyond a self-centered undertaking toward being the basis for a dialogue with multiple others, our respondents, research collaborators

and audience which will finally change our identity as researcher as well (Gabriel, 2015, pp. 333-334). So, we recognize the inter-subjective nature of research, multiple reflexive subjectivities are at play in the research process, and the dialogue between them potentially changes all participants involved, whether they identify themselves as researcher, respondent or audience of the research. In agreement with Hayes *et al.* (2016):

[...] we embrace a plurality of approaches, a proliferation of understandings and a recognition of multiple possibilities, as essential to help us understand an increasingly complex working environment, and a milieu where there is actually little agreement about diagnoses, interventions and outcomes but dominant discourse(s) assumes that there always is agreement. (p. 132)

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) is a methodology and analytical tool that unlocks ways in which different forms of social inequality, oppression and discrimination interact and overlap in multidimensional ways. In this special issue, we argue that the concept of intersectionality may support us to understand and give meaning to the subjectivities of all involved in the research process. One use of intersectionality in this context then is to foreground and honor the telling of subjective tales in research (Hayes *et al.*, 2016, p. 136). Intersectionality can also help in our understanding and application of post-qualitative ontological underpinnings. As Hayes *et al.* (2016, p. 137) remarked in regard to their own work: "This is not a paper with a single explicit theoretical framework. Instead we are moving through queer theory, feminist theory, post-colonial theory and other implicit theories, no doubt, which we do not even name. Our subjectivities, always in the process of being expressed, also imply multiple and perhaps contingent and unsteady theoretical frameworks."

We want to stress the importance of inter-subjectivity and a critical theory lens, especially in critical diversity research because of the upfront nature of difference, and to keep on making the power imbalances explicit. Not only the power dynamics embedded in the research site, but also the power dynamics between the researcher and the researched need to be taken into account. The concept of positionality may support us in recognizing and understanding this power balance. As Pringle and Booyesen (2018, pp. 38-39) purported "Positionality is more than just the recognition of one's own position *vis-à-vis* a research project and the researched, a declaration of intersecting identities in a piece of academic work, or explicitly stating a paradigmatic stance. Positionality also speaks to our own situated knowledge based on our embodied views, values and beliefs and insider-outsider status in relation to the research process, research setting, research context, research focus, research participants as others and research output." Lastly, making one's own positionality explicit is not a limitation, it actually serves to inform our "equality, diversity and inclusion" research rather than to invalidate it as biased or contaminated by personal perspectives and social or political viewpoints."

The intersectional and fluid nature of identities

A critical identity perspective highlights the shifting and fluid nature, as well as the multiplicity of our intersectional-identity subjectivities and its performativity at the micro level (individual, relational and collective identities), nested in the meso level (organizational and professional structures of domination) and embedded in macro level (socio-political-historical power matrices) contexts (Booyesen, 2018; Atewologun *et al.*, 2016). Intersectionality should be central to our thinking about social identity and identity work:

[...] because it focuses not only on the cross-cutting, indivisible, and overlapping categories, but also on the multiple intertwined social locations within the categories, and the socially constructed nature of identities, embedded in the socio-historical-political contexts, and time, and place. Moreover, it is applicable to both minority and majority populations. Future intersectional identity research needs to explore the intersection of privileged identities, and the interaction of intersecting

marginalized and privileged identities, in which experiences of marginalization might outweigh the recognition of privilege, or the recognition of privilege might outweigh the experiences of marginalization, based on contextual aspects. (Booyesen, 2018, pp. 17-18)

It is this understanding of the interplay of the multiple analytic levels that helps us to understand the individual sense making processes and everyday interactions. This multi-layered understanding is also emancipatory, because “[...] it can help to create spaces where non-normative individuals can resist, disrupt, withdraw, or refuse to enact the ‘limited’ accepted identities and create alternative discourses.” (Pringle and Booyesen, 2018, p. 43)

Moving beyond reflexivity incorporating creative imagination

Although we emphasize reflexivity regarding our background and social identities as researchers and the way intersectionality works in the multiple reflexive subjectivities at play in critical diversity research, we are inspired by Gabriel’s plea for moving beyond reflexivity to incorporate creative imagination. As Gabriel argues, reflexivity alone cannot deliver knowledge from data (Gabriel, 2015, p. 335). Researchers sometimes need creative imagination to tell their tale, whether it is interpreting data, developing theory or discussing the meaning of their work for changing social reality.

As Gabriel argues, creative imagination is essential in recognizing the creative possibilities afforded by the data (Gabriel, 2015, p. 332). He explains that reflexivity cannot replace the intelligence and craft that researchers exercise in generating empirical material and questioning and comparing it for “seeking similarities and exceptions, continuities and discontinuities, plans and improvisations (Gabriel, 2015, p. 334).” According to Gabriel, the ultimate imagination is in persistently asking the three related questions of “Why?” “What if?” and “So what?” (Gabriel, 2015, p. 334). He suggests that the success of the researcher ultimately lies in “the recognition of possibilities afforded by her empirical material rather than the constant exercise of conscious reflexivity, important as this is” (Gabriel, 2015, p. 335). For this, Gabriel argued, sociological imagination (Mills, 1959) is needed, and he expressed the wish that in future methodological and epistemological debates the attention shifts “from reflexivity to creative imagination as a sovereign virtue in conducting qualitative research” (Gabriel, 2015, p. 335). Still recognizing the importance of reflexivity, we support this plea for recognizing the importance of creative imagination in the research process as well. We, moreover, contend that reflexivity needs to be critical in nature, and want to propose that we need both critical conscious reflexivity, as well as creative imagination to inform and augment each other in conducting qualitative research.

While we do want to acknowledge the rise of post-qualitative methodologies and its new methodological directions situated within the broader “ontological turn” (Lather, 2016; Lather and St Pierre, 2013, Gerrard *et al.*, 2017), an in-depth discussion is outside the scope of this discussion and a cursory discussion would be rather arrogant, if not non-sensical. It may suffice at this stage to muse with Pullen *et al.* (2017, p. 129) “What becomes thinkable is a science that grows out of practical engagement with the world within a different ontology of knowing: This might be the beginnings of not only (post) qualitative research but a science worthy of the world.”

The contribution of this special issue

The aim of this Qualitative Research in Management and Organizations, special issue was to explore the challenges and the outcomes of approaches and methods in critical diversity scholarship.

The papers in this issue specifically focus on the different critical approaches to diversity scholarship and how they influence knowing and researching diversity, like, for example, how to frame research questions, what research object to choose, which methodologies and methods

to combine, which data sources to collect and analyze, how to assess the role of the researcher and finally, what knowledge contribution to make with the research in itself. The overall aim of the special issue was to provide both a space for paradigmatic debate and development as well as discussion on how to undertake critical methodological approaches to diversity management within the broad framework of critical studies of management and organization.

This special issue opens with Lotte Holck's critical reflection on the affective entanglement of both researcher and practitioners in a study of workplace diversity with a transformative agenda. Applying engaged ethnographic methods, she presents her experiences related to interventions in a municipal center. Holck reflects on how "useful" research with an allegedly emancipatory agenda is not considered favorable to neither majority nor minority employees. Using the notion of affectivity, she interprets the multiple voices of organizational members and her position as a change agent.

She critically reflects on her intention to produce "useful" research with practical implications. Lotte Holck contributes to critical diversity scholarship by exploring why presumably emancipatory initiatives apparently did not succeed, despite organizational goodwill. She questions the assumption that emancipation is inherently "good" and supported by "useful research." She pleads for scholars to share their affective and awkward field experiences with diversity interventions. Moreover, she argues that researchers and practitioners can only find alternative and emancipatory ways of organizing diversity through critical friendship and reciprocal engagement.

In the second contribution, Irene Ryan shares reflective insights on three key questions of concern to critical diversity scholarship: what influences play a part in framing a research project and the research questions, what determines the chosen methodology and what knowledge contributions do we want our research to make? Situating herself as an early-career scholar in New Zealand that aims to attract external research funds for her research project, she explains how she crafted and enacted an organization ethnography in the field of gender and diversity, being open about the pragmatic choices she made, the struggles in getting access to organizations and the embarrassment that was sometimes involved in translating a critical approach in day-to-day language.

The third paper, by Tianyuan Yu, Niya Peng and Albert Mills, contributes to further developing critical methodology by showing how critical hermeneutics is applied in a particular case and what the potential challenges and limitations of this methodology are. The authors revisit their earlier critical hermeneutics analysis of the case of the seventh century Chinese female emperor Wu Zetian (Peng *et al.*, 2015). In that article (published in equality, diversity and inclusion), they argued that Wu Zetian pursued gender equality through improving women's status in social life, politics and sexuality and can be considered a "lost story" of female leadership.

Revisiting the case of Wu Zetian, they offer a reflexive critique and an enriched analysis of the same textual excerpts. Re-interpreting the texts with more attention to the hidden meaning and subtexts, suggests that Wu Zetian emphasized gender equality to legitimate her privilege as a female ruler. Her agenda was apparently aimed at enhancing women's social status, but, perhaps more importantly, also paved the way for her own pursuit of power. By exploring the complexity and paradox of Wu Zetian as a historical figure, the authors demonstrate the potential of critical hermeneutics as an innovative methodology to study gender, diversity and history.

The fourth paper, by Muhammad Bilal Farooq, develops hermeneutic methodology as well, but in this case focusing on the application of a Gadamarian and Ricourian hermeneutics. By examining how these hermeneutics can be operationalized in an interpretative accounting project, he contributes to knowledge about how hermeneutic methodology influences data-collection, data-analysis and the writing up of results. He confirms the need to use verbatim transcriptions of the texts that need to be interpreted and he advocates the need to critically

reflect upon the pre-understandings the researcher has about the text. Pre-understandings may contain popular beliefs, entrenched ideologies and hidden power structures that may be counterproductive in understanding a text. Farooq pleads for undertaking manual coding of texts, in order to allow continuous reflection and revisiting earlier understandings. When writing up the results the researcher is allowed to reconfigure the meaning of the text, as long as the researchers work is trustworthy to the reader and the researcher recognizes that this interpretation is never complete nor final.

The final paper contributes to developing methodology about participatory action research, by reflecting upon grassroots inclusive change in a division of a USA University. The author, Robin Selzer, participated in a Diversity and Inclusion Committee that aimed to address racial discrimination and support a cultural agile organization by using cultural audits as an instrument to foster this change. Selzer recognized all employees as stakeholders and invited them to participate in the cultural audit, which consisted of a survey and a participatory action research part. During the participatory action research, members of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee discussed the results of the survey with the employees and involved them in recognizing Circles of Action to change the organization from within. The author recognized that transformational change cannot occur without an analysis of systemic and oppressive constraints an organization has created. What contributed to transformational change in this particular organization is that the process was facilitated by members of the organization, that they encouraged voices in the margins to participate and that they got support from the top. They plea for transformational change to be an organic process that grows from within the organization.

In our opinion we have accomplished the aims we have set out to do. The five papers in this special issue represent a wide range of approaches and methods in critical diversity scholarship, moving from the reflexive subjectivities of an early career scholar in New Zealand getting and implementing a research grant to the multiple reflexive subjectivities of a diversity scholar, her gatekeeper and their audience during an ethnographic field studies in a municipal in Denmark. Moreover, we read about further developing hermeneutic methodology by scholars who revisit earlier critical hermeneutics using a historical case of female leadership and we learn about how critical reflection informs the operationalization of Gadamarian and Ricourian hermeneutics in data collection, data analysis and writing up of interpretations. Finally, we learn how mixed methods are pragmatically applied in a participatory action research aimed at supporting grassroots inclusive change, understanding how a participatory and self-organized research process supports transformational change within a particular local context.

Practical applicability –bridging theory and practice

We are grateful that all papers in this special have practical applicability. Sometimes this is an explicit aim of the paper, for example, the paper by Farooq contributes to the application of hermeneutics in the accounting research. The paper by Selzer describes a participatory action research explicitly aimed at supporting the cultural agility of an academic organization. The other papers rather give examples of how a research is applied practically, either it being a revisiting of critical hermeneutics or critical reflecting upon organization ethnography aimed at supporting diversity in a municipal organization.

This emphasis on the connections between scholarship and practice and scholar practitioners research is important. These connections have not always been clear in the academic community; this is one of the criticisms that practitioners have of academics who live in “ivory towers.” For example Hayes *et al* (2016) critically address the split between practice and research by adopting “research/practice” or “practice/research” both as terminology and as actions that are inextricably intertwined and equal in nature. “So the first paradox we identify explicitly is that we seek to be grounded in day-to-day action, as much

as philosophical abstraction, and perhaps conflate these in our subjectivities, in a sustained tension” (Hayes *et al.*, 2016, p. 131). Researchers Bansal *et al.* (2012) described three ways in which the paradoxes underlying the relationship between research and practice can be bridged to overcome this gap, namely, evidence-based management, engaged scholarship and relational scholarship. Evidence-based management aims to inspire practice through theoretical and empirical research knowledge, because better evidence generates better decisions. Engaged scholarship focuses on the production of research as multistage and action-based process, engaging scholars, practitioners and participants in solving complex problems in contexts. Relational scholarship shifts the focus further away from the research community as such, to the interface of research and practice. It focuses on mutual co-construction, equal partnerships and reciprocity between researchers, practitioners and the community (researched), and the fusion of methodologies and paradigms. It functions in the liminal in-between space that bridges the gap between research and practice (Bansal *et al.*, 2012).

The papers in this special issue clearly fit the definition of engaged scholarship and relational scholarship. In agreement with Gabriel (2015, p. 332), we want to argue “against the emerging orthodoxy of qualitative research methodology, [...] and plea to relax methodological strictures and judge the quality of research pragmatically in terms of its scientific value, social usefulness, and practical applicability.”

Conclusion

We encourage authors to keep on asking curious and crucial questions, like “what diversity knowledge do I want to contribute with my research project” or “how can we further improve our critical hermeneutic understanding of a historical case of female leadership?” or “how can I uncover the recursive patterns of marginalization and exclusion better?” Moreover, we encourage critical reflexive questions regarding how inclusive grassroots change has been achieved in a concrete organization. In conclusion, this *QROM* Special Issue: Approaches, Methods and Critical Diversity scholarship: the challenges and the outcomes engages with the issue of how selected paradigms and methods of diversity research can be better understood, advanced, critically evaluated and how innovations in these methods contribute to a better understanding of diversity in organizations. It is our hope that this special edition will further our readers’ understanding and insights, and fuel their interest and passion in critical diversity scholar-practitioner research. Lastly, we do not have the answers. However, we need to keep on asking the questions that are crucial – in our (subjective) opinions. The questions we raised in this paper need to be explored further. We need to keep on interrogating our ways of doing inquiry, and being, in the face of and in the midst of difference. The critical diversity research landscape will be richer because of that.

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Note

1. While some of those approaches emerged after the publication of Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) paradigmatic schema, Feminism was an important paradigm that was curiously “neglected” (Hearn and Parkin, 1983) and clearly did not fit in any one paradigm (Mills and Simmons, 1995).

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