Article

Women Whistleblowers: Examining parrhesia, power and gender with Sophocles' Antigone

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Abstract
How do gender and power intersect in whistleblowing situations? In this article, we deepen understandings of whistleblowing as a contemporary form of parrhesia. To explore the complex interactions of gender and power, we analyse in-depth, qualitative data from senior women managers whistleblowing in financial services organizations in France, Ireland and the United States. Sophocles' play *Antigone*, read with a feminist lens, inspires a novel theoretical framing for understanding how structures of gender and power can be subverted, as women whistleblowers move between positions of masculine, feminine, subjugation and control. Our article contributes to organizational research on whistleblowing by showing how parrhesiastic risk intersects with gender in nuanced ways: violent gendered reprisals can occur in momentary interactions that are painfully internalized, prompting a search for support from outside sources. These acts of exclusion necessitate the creation of new subject positions beyond those on offer within the organization. Overall our article demonstrates how experiences of 'outsider truth-telling' from the margins shed light on the power dynamics in whistleblowing situations.

Introduction

Whistleblowing is an important means by which information about wrongdoing in an organization can reach those capable of rectifying it. Major disasters including the BP Gulf oil spill, Bhopal and the Volkswagen emission scandal could have been avoided had workers speaking out been heeded.

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Organization, management and business ethics scholars increasingly recognize the importance of whistleblowing, as do legislators, regulators and investors worldwide. To date, however, this recognition has come at the expense of a nuanced understanding of gender and how it plays out in whistleblowing cases.

In this article, we begin to rectify this. It is critical to consider this issue now because new whistleblowing laws drive changes in organizational policies and practices. Organization scholars interested in whistleblowing tend to draw on the concept of parrhesia or 'fearless speech' in which an individual is compelled to speak the truth as they see it, even though they risk danger where their speech involves criticism of powerful people or institutions (Foucault, 1983, p. 5). However, analyses of gender and power tend to be limited or missing from studies of organizational parrhesia as whistleblowing (Agostinho & Thylstrup, 2019; Maxwell, 2018), as is the case in organization theory and business ethics more generally (Pullen & Rhodes, 2014).

In response, we adopt a feminist lens that focuses on the complex ways in which gender, power and subjectivity intersect in whistleblowing parrhesia. Feminist approaches help problematize established fields of research, showing the terrain as uneven and comprising hidden exclusions, thus enabling new theoretical conceptions to emerge (cf. Hemmings, 2012; Vachhani & Pullen, 2019). With a sensitivity to gender and power, we analyse the subject positions articulated by senior women whistleblowers working in a male-dominated sector, financial services, in France, Ireland and the United States, as they narrate experiences of retaliation during whistleblowing episodes. We focus on how they position themselves, paying particular attention to aspects that do not appear in extant whistleblowing studies. The resulting accounts are ambivalent and complex. Gender emerges, but in disjointed, episodic ways. Long-established hierarchical structures appear troubled, as these females in high-level roles find themselves marginalized, demeaned and rendered child-like by managers' responses to their whistleblowing attempts. At the same time, the women whistleblowers asserted their formal power and status to uphold the rules of the organization where they witnessed those rules being transgressed, even sacrificing much to do so; they persisted in their whistleblowing struggles even as they found themselves doubly excluded – as women and as whistleblowers.

Our analysis is inspired by insights from organization scholarship problematizing how gender and power intersect in workers' subjectivities. We find that readings of Sophocles' play, *Antigone*, usefully shed light on the fluidity and complexity of gender, sex and power in situations of struggle (Butler, 2000; Contu, 2014; Harding, 2013). This enables a novel theoretical framing of whistleblowing and gender that illuminates the associated exclusions, detachments and strategies for surviving the experience.

Our article begins by presenting extant research on parrhesia, whistleblowing and gender. Relevant insights from organizational scholarship pertaining to the theoretical framing we adopt are followed by the methods section. Our findings are presented in three main themes: defending the idealized organization through asserting one's status, encountering gendered reprisal and persisting in the whistleblowing claim. Our discussion elucidates the value of our findings for research on whistleblowing and gender in organization studies, while our article concludes by emphasizing the importance of knowledge provided by those positioned outside 'the norm', to further our understanding of organizations and truth-telling.

Whistleblowing Theory: Gender and Parrhesia

Whistleblowing is normally understood as the 'reporting of wrongdoing by a person who has reasonable grounds to believe that the information reported is true at the time' (ISO, 2021). Theoretical understanding of whistleblowing in organizations has been enhanced by scholars drawing on

Foucault's concept of parrhesia (Vandekerckhove & Langenberg, 2012). As Foucault notes in his extensive analysis, parrhesia has had a variety of meanings through the ages, ranging from public speech within Athenian democracy, to advising monarchs in the Hellenistic age, and a philosopher's truth-telling through critique (Foucault, 1983, 2011a, 2011b). Thus, while direct comparisons with contemporary organizations are unhelpful (Jack, 2004), the core idea of frank, critical speech from a person with lower status, that incurs risk to the speaker (Foucault, 1983), remains inspirational in a variety of organizational settings in which authority must be challenged. These have included advice-giving in the British Civil Service (Barratt, 2019), collective organizing in organic farming (Skinner, 2011) and public critique by academics (Barratt, 2008). Viewing whistleblowing as parrhesia has been of particular interest; topics range from anonymized truth-telling via online networks (Munro, 2017) and worker disclosures challenging financial corruption (Kenny, 2019), to revelations of state overreach in digital surveillance practices (Weiskopf, 2023). The risk incurred in parrhesiastic speech emerges as whistleblower reprisal (Alford, 2001; Kenny, 2018; Stein, 2021).

Parrhesia encompasses an account of subject formation, which Foucault particularly highlights in his later work on ethical and philosophical parrhesia (Foucault, 2011a). The parrhesiastes – or truth teller – becomes 'as he (sic) ought to be and wishes to be' as a result of adhering to her sense of duty; the subject of ethical speech is formed in and through the process of speaking out and dealing with the risky consequences (Foucault, 2005, p. 318). The intersection of power and subjectivity within this whistleblower self-formation has been of interest for organizational scholars; empirical studies show how professional skill, or *tekhne*, shapes people's parrhesiastic selves (Weiskopf & Tobias-Miersch, 2016), while workers can find themselves 'passionately attached' to organizational norms demanding organizational compliance (Kenny, Fotaki, & Vandekerckhove, 2020). Judith Butler's feminist theorizing has inspired analyses of how subjection to powerful norms can cause pain to whistleblowers (Kenny et al., 2020; Kenny & Fotaki, 2023). Drawing on Foucault's earlier work, Butler (1997b) views power as constitutive of the self, 'power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbour and preserve in the beings that we are' (p. 2). For whistleblowers, workplace norms, including for example ideals of loyalty, can be deeply held, representing the 'terms through which subjects are recognized' – the very conditions of one's existence (c.f. Butler, 2009, p. 3). The disturbance and self-beration that transgressing such norms brings, when one speaks out regardless of risk, are not easily shaken off (Kenny, 2018, 2019), thus whistleblower reprisal can paradoxically be internalized by the speaker. Workers' exercise of parrhesia is thus a complex exercise in self-constitution amid powerful norms that both constrain and enable.

Despite this attention to the various risks inherent to becoming whistleblower-parrhesiast, gender dynamics are largely overlooked. For Maxwell (2018, 2019), both Foucault and his subsequent interpreters have downplayed the fact that power plays a role in deciding who is recognizable as a truth-teller, or parrhesiastes, in the first place. In practice, not all truth-tellers are perceived as equal; race, class and gender dynamics structure which whistleblowers get to be seen as credible and which ones are not to be believed. Going forward, a focus on parrhesia by 'outsiders' is needed, in which 'individuals illegible to their societies *as* truth-tellers tell insurgent truths' (Maxwell, 2019, p. xiii). Insurgent truths are statements that perform two functions: they both highlight the exclusions creating the speaking outsider's very illegibility, and they reveal information destabilizing the status quo. Maxwell critiques Foucault for ignoring these dimensions. Yet his detailed account of the parrhesia of Creusa in the Ion (Foucault, 2011b) and the embodied practice of outsider critique by the Cynics (Foucault, 2011a) indicate some sensitivity to this issue albeit outside truth-telling is not a focus of his work. While Foucault is ambivalent at best regarding gender and

parrhesia, as in other work (Dorion, 2020; Macey, 2004; Metzger, 1990), his life's work is nothing if not an ongoing call to problematize power and domination in all its forms and is thus useful in feminist critique (McNay, 1992; Metzger, 1990). Studies of gender and power in organizations have drawn on his ideas (Calás & Smircich, 1991; Thomas & Davies, 2005). Reflecting on his work at the end of his life, cut short at age 57, Foucault noted that he had limited time to devote to parrhesia, only capable of 'superficial surveys' of its appearances in Ancient Greek literature (Barratt, 2019). He compelled his audience to continue the work he began, and to examine how the 'dramatics of discourse' shape the various ways in which parrhesia emerges today (Foucault, 2011b, p. 67). With this in mind, this article focuses on how gender and power intersect in the construction of parrhesiastic whistleblowing subjects.

Whistleblowing research: gender and bodies

How do gender discourses influence the experience of whistleblowing? Scholarship is limited. Studies tend to focus on the experiences of whistleblowers identifying as female. Gender can affect perceptions; women whistleblowers are more likely to be seen as passive participants than assertive protagonists, even in whistleblowing struggles in which they hold active leadership positions (Avila, Harrison, & Richter, 2018). Women's whistleblowing has traditionally been taken less seriously in cases of sexual harassment and assault, giving rise to movements including #MeToo and Time's Up (Bushnell, 2020; Hickerson, 2018; Morais dos Santos Bruss, 2019).

Perceptions of gender can exacerbate whistleblower reprisal. Women whistleblowers can experience a greater level of retaliation than men (Hunt, 2010). A higher status within the organization's hierarchy does not appear to make much difference. This advantage can lessen the retaliation experienced by male-identified whistleblowers, but this does not hold for senior women who remain as likely as their junior colleagues to experience reprisals (Rehg, Miceli, Near, & Van Scotter, 2008). Female whistleblowers whose names are publicly disclosed can be subject to greater criticism than males (DesAutels, 2009), while military whistleblower Chelsea Manning was harassed for being a gender non-conforming person and thus not a 'proper' truth-teller: 'because she appears queer and improperly gendered, [she] has nothing important to say and cannot be heard as a meaningful, proper public speaker' (Maxwell, 2019, p. 268). When whistleblowers exert parrhesia, gender can be used, as can race or class, to exacerbate retaliation and risk:

> if a whistleblower has socially-marginalized traits, these are sure to elicit trait-specific retaliatory measures as a way to emphasize just how much the whistleblower always has been and always will be marginalized in our society – as a way to emphasize that the whistleblower was never really an insider after all. (DesAutels, 2009, p. 231)

It is clear that, in practice, gender and power can intersect in situations of parrhesia, particularly in cases of outsider truth-telling. Theories of organizational parrhesia and whistleblowing have yet to incorporate such empirical insights, remaining gender-blind.

Gender, Power and Organizations

Beyond parrhesia and whistleblowing, organization scholars have developed nuanced understandings of subjectivity, gender and power. Inspired by both Foucault and Butler, studies show how masculine and feminine subject positions emerge through power dynamics, while male and female bodies move between these positions, performing their identifications (Lewis, 2014; Tyler, 2019). Thus, identifications are not determined a priori; they are contingent and open to change.

Even so, critically, these movements always take place amid constraints (Butler, 2004); subjects can experience vast differences in how they are treated based on the perceived sex of their bodies. This is demonstrated by persistent gender inequality and violence against women and non-binary people (Fotaki & Harding, 2018), while more mundane restrictions can also persist, even for women in the highest echelons of organizations. This work is feminist, focused on elucidating patriarchal power and resisting women's socio-economic inequalities. In industries such as financial services, in which masculine behaviours and relatedly, male bodies, are favoured, females can find themselves constructed as 'other' – outside of the norm – and hence particularly vulnerable to exclusion (Gherardi, 2011; Grey, 1998; Ho, 2009), an experience that can impact upon one's sense of self and self-worth (Baker & Brewis, 2020; Fisher, 2007). It is in such a setting that this article is located.

In a study of senior women managers, Fotaki and Harding examine how gendered exclusion cannot be reduced to the impact of having a sexed body. Interviewing senior women about their careers reveals a paradoxical sense of being, at once, both included and excluded; 'even the most successful women can feel themselves reduced to the status of children by the treatment they experience' (Fotaki & Harding, 2018, p. 31). As the women describe their accomplishments and the pride these evoke, there is a sense of never being 'at home' in the organization, regardless of achievement. The authors observe that we often imagine ourselves quite differently to the way we are socially constituted, drawing on Butler's (1997a) insight that: 'one may, as it were, meet that socially-constituted self by surprise, with alarm or pleasure, even with shock' (p. 40). This moment of shock can engender self-beration and an internalized rejection of a self that does not belong. It can also, however, lead to senior women actively opposing the terms in which they have been placed. Fotaki and Harding (2018) examine in particular the resistances and refusals that can result from being placed in the position of 'other'.

In summary, issues of subjectivity and power shape experiences of parrhesia in whistleblowing, and are pertinent to our understanding of gender in organizations not least in the context of senior women. To date, however, these perspectives have not been brought together in order to understand the experiences of women whistleblowers. Addressing this, in this article we develop a more nuanced theoretical framing for understanding 'outsider truth-telling' in organizations, in which a whistleblower emerges who already occupies a devalued, othered position in the organization before they speak out from their status as manager. In so doing, we continue a trajectory of feminist analyses of organizational power and gender (Bell, Meriläinen, Taylor, & Tienari, 2019; Fotaki, 2013; Lewis, 2014; Vachhani, 2012). Insights from readings of Sophocles' *Antigone* offer rich potential, described next.

Blowing the Whistle as a Woman? An Inspiration from *Antigone*

In Sophocles' *Antigone*, the protagonist transgresses the decree of the king, Creon, in order to bury her brother, an act for which she is violently punished. The play's depiction of a woman resisting the demands of power despite the sacrifice required inspires organization scholarship (Papadopoulos, 2012; Sucher, 2007). Two perspectives are of particular interest here. The first relates to Antigone as an exemplar of whistleblowing. As Contu (2014) describes, the story of Antigone fascinates people in a similar way that whistleblowers do; these are unusual figures compelled to pursue a singular drive to enact their truths, regardless of the consequences (see Sophocles, 1912, pp. 6, 18). In her pursuit, Antigone resists the normative expectations placed upon her as a citizen and a woman. Her radical break from these enables us to envisage entirely new subject positions for those who resist power driven by a singular compulsion, including whistleblowers (Contu, 2014, p. 402). Honig (2013) reads Antigone's act as more than a radical refusal, arguing that, in her

speech explaining her protest, Antigone draws on competing tropes to both engage in, and critique, power: thus opening up new possibilities.

A second reading sees the *Antigone* providing insight into the contingency and revisability of gender positions within contemporary organizations. Drawing on Judith Butler's (2000) interpretation, Harding (2013) describes how Antigone compels a rethinking of the position of men and women. Antigone's unique kinship backstory, in which her father Oedipus is also the son of her mother Jocasta, means that traditional structures of gender, kinship and power are problematized and opened up for questioning. As the play proceeds, Antigone comes to occupy almost all the available gendered positions; 'Now if she thus can flout authority/ Unpunished, I am woman, she the man', as Creon protests at her insubordination (Sophocles, 1912, p. 15). Oedipus informs Antigone that she is now more like a son than a daughter to him, depicting his male sons as akin to women, while Antigone acts toward her sister Ismene like a brother. 'By the time this drama is done', Butler (2000) concludes, Antigone has 'taken the place of nearly every man in her family' (p. 62). Antigone thus – for Butler – becomes 'the occasion for a new field of the human' where the political, social, gender and kinship orders are displaced (Butler, 2000, p. 82). Even so, Sophocles' play is ultimately a story of sacrifice; Antigone is sentenced to death by Creon because of her dissent. She is entombed alive in a cave, where she kills herself.

Antigone's refusal of norms, her flow and flux between positions, and also her experience of oppression as a result of this transgression, yield new ways to understand the complex workings of gender, sexuality and management in contemporary workplaces (Harding, 2013). Structures and cultures of organizations can tend to fix workers in rigid gender positions (Acker, 1990), but the lived experience of working can – in practice – offer possibilities to escape from such restrictive norms: 'organizations are places where, for some people at least. . .there is freedom from the pains of gender. However, this relief is temporary: one is always surprised back into gender and into its traumas' (Harding, 2013, p. 124). Echoing Contu's observations, this reading of *Antigone* invites us to consider new norms in which movement between positions that are 'neither masculine nor feminine but having the potential at any moment to be either or both, or many or none' (Harding, 2013, p. 124). These fluid organizational gender positions come with sacrifice, as Antigone experienced viscerally. Even open and revisable subject positions risk entombment and pain, when faced with oppressive gender structures.

Parrhesia involves an ongoing constitution of the self, as the speaker 'comes into being' in and through following their compulsion to speak truth. Our interest is in how power and gender shape this process. *Antigone* suggests that where the truth-teller emerges from outside the norm of 'legitimate speaker', the compulsion to follow one's drive can render oppressive norms irrelevant, at least in the moment of resistance. Acting anyway, gender can represent both a revisable position but also a fatal constraint. The *Antigone* offers an account of subjectivity that both troubles, and suffers under, the discourses of power by which it is constituted, all the while laying claim to new and enabling positions in relation to these, as a duty to truth is fulfilled through action.

Method

This study examines how gender and power intersect for whistleblowing women. Given our focus on subjective experience, in-depth interviews are ideal. And because we are interested in the complexity of power structures, we focus on senior women managers who have disclosed wrongdoing, because of their hierarchical status and also their positions of outsiders both as whistleblowers and as women in financial services. The data featured in this paper are drawn from two prior research projects, carried out separately by each author. Both projects involved interview-based, in-depth

Table 1. Interview Data.

Person	Position	Type of organization	Original observation	Country
Maya	Compliance manager	Retail bank	Funds processing from illegal activities	USA
Yvonne	Lending supervisor	Bank specializing in property loans ('building society')	Illegal mortgage lending practices. False accusation of colleague by CEO	Ireland
Joan	Mortgage executive, retail banking; role was to find defects in bad loans	Retail bank	Supplying US government with misleading information on mortgages and home insurance	USA
Isabel	Senior risk analyst	Retail bank	Systematic under-evaluation of bank's client accounts' risks in order to favour business	France
Sophie	Communication project manager	Private bank	Parallel shadow accounting system and tax evasion practices	France

analyses of whistleblowing in the financial services industry, using similar research designs, research questions and interview protocols along with interpretive approaches to data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Both adhered to our institutional research ethics protocols based on the *European Union's guidelines for Ethics in Social Science and Humanities*. Where such congruence is present, combining data sets from different studies is helpful in order to deepen understanding (Reay et al., 2013).

Data collection

Our data comprises qualitative interviews with women who blew the whistle in the financial sector in France, Ireland and the US between 2007 and 2014. Interviewees occupied different roles including compliance manager, lending supervisor, mortgage executive, risk analyst and communication project manager (see Table 1). All participants were in their forties or fifties, and self-identified – to our knowledge – as ciswomen. All fit the definition of whistleblower adopted for our study (ISO, 2021). As is typical in whistleblowing research, participants were contacted via professional whistleblowing advice organizations, with a snowball sampling enabling further contacts (Kenny, 2019; Van Portfliet & Kenny, 2021).

Interviewees were asked to narrate their experiences of whistleblowing, including reprisals, in an open-ended way (Essers, 2009). Prior to each interview secondary data was gathered from newspapers, online sources and court transcripts. Interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and two hours, and were recorded and transcribed. Two were conducted in French with Fanchini providing a translation. The interviews did not focus on gender especially, yet it emerged as a salient concept.

Producing analysis

Initial discussions between authors yielded a common interest in understanding how gender plays out in these women's accounts of whistleblower retaliation. Our readings of extant whistleblowing literature in organizational studies and business ethics suggested this topic is frequently

overlooked. Initial iteration between theory and data yielded a set of sensitizing concepts with which to begin our analysis. These included people's motives, perception of rules and institutional norms, experiences of reprisal and supports to counter it. We were struck by the similarities in these women's accounts despite coming from different geographical backgrounds and voicing different claims (Table 1). Focusing on these similarities, and how they appeared to inform the construction of people's subject positions in their accounts of speaking out, we turned to psychosocial organization theory, which has valuably informed studies of whistleblowing subjectivity to date (Alford, 2001; Contu, 2014; Stein, 2021). We thus broadly followed a constructivist grounded theory strategy (Charmaz, 2006, p. 9), which allows for the incorporation of appropriate theoretical perspectives in data analysis (Kenny, 2018; Kenny et al., 2020; Özdemir Kaya & Fotaki, 2023). Focusing on the apparent narration of subject positions, we followed exemplar studies (Parker, 2005; Riach, Rumens, & Tyler, 2014) and highlighted instances in which people drew on discourses in order to account for themselves and construct identifications (cf. Butler, 2005). These instances point to the ways in which the power that shapes us compels expressions of subjecthood in particular ways (Harding, 2008, p. 46).

We each read through our data sets separately, identifying common aspects, producing extended notes and comparing these across projects. We came together to discuss emergent themes, moving back and forth between theory and data. We read and re-read the material, categorizing sections of text for first-level coding. Initial codes included 'relationships with networks and relatives', 'empathy and emotions', 'understanding for the wrongdoers' and 'desire to cure the company'. As we proceeded, initial codes and their subsets were checked for overlaps, necessitating the merging of some, jettisoning others and creating new codes (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). For reasons of space, in this article, we focus on the subset of these codes that appeared both particularly salient and novel with respect to extant literature.

We are each experienced in empirical research on whistleblowing, but the data appearing here emerged from a particular scene of women interviewing women, no doubt influencing our responses and choices (Phillips, Pullen, & Rhodes, 2014; Pullen, 2006; see also Blakely, 2007; Ezzy, 2010). We each felt and continue to feel a sense of frustration relating to the invisibility – or simplistic reduction – of gender in whistleblowing research. Listening to our interviewees' reports of gendered reprisal yielded resonance, echoes of past experiences of exclusion, albeit less stark and with less import. In addition, conscious of our relatively protected and certainly privileged places in publicly funded academic institutions, we feel dismay and a sense of impotence, learning of the extent of whistleblower reprisal and the stark ways in which even senior women can be demeaned. Interviews emerge in interaction and, while we followed our training protocols in asking questions, these embodied affects likely influenced desires to persist and unpack these heretofore-ignored aspects (Gilmore & Kenny, 2015). Moreover our previous work has tended to foreground issues of power and exclusion in organizational settings, with Kenny's work focused on subjectivity and identity within this (Kenny, 2019; Kenny et al., 2020), a heritage that inevitably shaped the resulting analysis. Rather than limitations, these reflections might be read as elements of a co-constituted piece of research. We seek to paint as detailed a picture of people's narratives as research articles allow, to enable the nuance and complexity of each account to emerge.

Our financial services interviewees, despite being located across the globe, each described in depth how masculine structures and cultures were present in their organizations, long before they spoke out about wrongdoing. While we do not have space to elaborate in detail, we describe how these aspects emerged in their whistleblowing experiences, and specifically in the reprisals they encountered. In presenting three major themes, we weave our analytic insights throughout the findings, in order to enable us to move toward theoretical development in our Discussion section.

Findings

Defending the ideal organization

When explaining why they spoke out, or 'blew the whistle', all interviewees espoused a commitment to upholding the rules and regulations of financial services, even where this went against the norms of their firm and where commitment to rules required personal sacrifice.

With more than ten years of experience in the banking industry, Isabel worked as a senior analyst in the risk department of a well-known bank in France. She became aware of consistent misrepresentations of the extent of the client company risk that her bank was carrying. Under-reporting risk, she explained, meant that her bank could avail of more credit; the practice 'favours business'. Isabel repeatedly contested the progressive lowering of standards and precautions in detecting risk, voicing her concerns during weekly meetings with her colleagues and direct manager. Isabel recalled a meeting in which she asked why a long-standing risk assessment rule – the 'four-eye' review method[1] – was not being followed:

> The funny thing is. . .there had been this meeting a few months ago, and everyone was discussing cases, and I asked, 'But I thought we had the four-eyes rule?' What is funny is that this term was never mentioned. In the banking industry, everyone knows that rule, but in my team, no one ever mentioned it, so I said, 'But what about the four-eyes rule?' And then someone said, 'Obviously it's to prevent mistakes, so that there's peer control.' 'OK, so why don't we use it anymore?' I asked, and the person answered, 'Well, anyway, no one does it that much anyway.' Oh really? I had been working in that job for 20 years and I had always seen the four-eyes rule.

Isabel was committed to the issue: the idea that her boss was putting the bank at risk in order to favour short-term 'commercial interests'. She was aware that she was being asked to ignore the core principles of risk analysis. Isabel described raising these issues persistently for two years, first contradicting her direct manager, then continuing to escalate to ever-more senior managers, undeterred by the fact that she was discouraged each time she spoke up. Her opposition ended up with a confrontation with the head director of the bank's risk management department – this was the highest level that her claim could reach without going outside the firm. Isabel described how others in the bank viewed her actions:

> So, being a truly conscientious financial analyst, and sometimes highlighting the weaknesses of a case, being cautious for the sake of the bank, is seen as outdated and inefficient. If you do this, you feel like a petty, needy person, who understands nothing about a 'modern' and 'dynamic' bank.

Isabel equates her adherence to the rules with clarity and self-awareness; the financial analyst who can identify weaker cases and raise the alarm is 'truly conscious'. At the same time, she describes how her caution is perceived by others: weak and mean, 'petty and needy'. Because of her consistent opposition to the lax approach to risk, Isabel was eventually dismissed. She continued to fight her case and, in 2021, her dismissal was deemed illegitimate by a French court.

Like Isabel, Sophie is a French woman with long-standing experience in banking. Working as a communication manager at a Swiss private bank in Paris, she was in charge of organizing events where wealthy prospects would meet French as well as Swiss account managers. In 2008, employees became concerned about large-scale tax evasion practices within the bank, which led to a tense atmosphere and a high employee turnover. As the main event manager, Sophie was afraid she could be prosecuted for participating in the corporate fraud. She describes repeatedly questioning the presence of Swiss account managers in the bank's offices, despite it being legally

forbidden, with senior management, raising it three times with her compliance team. The whistle-blowing process was protracted as is often the case (Vandekerckhove & Phillips, 2019). Like Isabel, Sophie spent a number of years voicing concerns. Colleagues identified her as a whistle-blower and would confide sensitive information, and she was also approached as a source for police investigation teams.

Sophie recalls an interview with her female HR manager – one of many such conversations – in her book:

HR Manager:	You keep saying that there are Swiss accounts in the bank [in the French offices in Paris]. But you know very well that can't be true Sophie, because it's illegal.
S:	But wait a minute, you arrived at [Bank Name] at the same time. You know full well that the Swiss were there. Some of them were part of the teams. . .
HR Manager:	Not at all, Sophie, I don't remember anything about that. You know, if you're tired, the best thing would be to go home and call your doctor. Take a few days off. You're talking about Swiss account managers flying in to attend events, but it's absolutely impossible because it's not allowed.
S:	But they attended all of the golf tournaments we organized. You were there in Lyon and Lille. You saw them. I asked the compliance department three times. I want to know what could happen to me if the police investigate. I'm scared.
HR Manager:	Don't be, Sophie. Go home and take a few days to rest. You seem really tired.

Sophie recounts how the HR manager tried to convince her that no Swiss account managers were attending the events her team organized, despite Sophie arguing otherwise.

In advance of a rumoured police perquisition, Sophie's computer had been 'cleared' overnight, after she refused a request to delete most of its content. At this point Sophie wrote a letter to the main directors and managers of the executive committee, detailing all the information she possessed regarding tax evasion practices. She questioned the disappearance of her files, afraid of being later accused of deleting them. Sophie received an acknowledgement for receipt of the letter. She described the CEO's subsequent reaction:

> He fakes enthusiasm but I can feel a hint of nervousness in his voice; his tone is sugar-coated but patronizing, with a paternalistic tone. All of this scares me. He minimizes what I have written: 'What is this letter you have sent us? You're making a fuss. What is this story about? You take things too seriously. It's nothing, you worry too much.'

Here again, we see the degree to which her attempts contradict the dominant culture. 'You take things too seriously. . .you worry too much', she is told. Nonetheless Sophie continued to insist on the rules being followed. Over time, Sophie found herself isolated by senior management, then threatened and, finally, she ended up leaving the company as part of a redundancy plan. The bank was prosecuted and held accountable for large-scale tax evasion in 2021.

When another interviewee, Joan, began to raise questions about the fraud that she knew was occurring across many branches in her US mortgage bank, she was at first told to be quiet about it, despite her status as vice president in charge of fraud detection. Joan's role was to find defects in bad loans, defects she was encountering more and more as rules around lending were being ignored, and application documents falsified, in the run-up to the subprime mortgage crisis of 2008. As in Sophie's case, Joan was told to lessen her commitment to rule-following, and adhere to the newly adopted, and more relaxed, norms of bank lending. Joan's boss explained to her that their taking short-cuts was akin to 'jaywalking, not murder'. In other words, she need not take it as seriously as she was doing. Joan insisted on taking it further, and escalated her concerns about mortgage fraud

to senior management. She became known within the organization as a whistleblower. By the time Kenny and Joan met, she had been dismissed as a consequence of her blowing the whistle on fraudulent loans.

Maya, a fellow US citizen and senior banking manager, had felt similarly compelled to follow the rules despite the pressures from others to bend them and to turn a blind eye. Her former bank processed funds from clients' illegal activities including online gambling, then channelled the money into the formal banking system. Maya described her role as focused on ensuring compliance with the US Bank Secrecy Act (BSA), which required illegal activity on the part of bank clients to be reported:

> A part of my position, the BSA, [is] you have to look for suspicious activity. You have to do certain things within regulation.

Maya could spot the well-known signals, including large-scale gold purchases. She quickly realized that the norm in her bank was complicity with breaking the rules around illegal activity and money-laundering:

> In that first week. . .that was when I became aware of complicity in everything. . .It took me seven weeks [between starting the job and speaking up].

Maya describes being unambiguous about the importance of following these rules, as she stated: 'You have to do certain things'; you have to do them because it is 'part of [the] position'.

As had Isabel, Maya repeatedly met with her bosses to try to encourage them to change their behaviour and follow the rules. She found it stressful, an 'emotional rollercoaster' but persisted anyway:

> They knew that I still disapproved of what was going on. The debate with the President would still go on. I would go in and say 'John, they (clients) are buying gold.'

> 'Maya, it's not illegal to buy gold.'

> 'I know, but they are buying a lot of gold and silver.'

> He'd go 'Maya, if I bought gold would you file [a report] on me?'

> And I said, 'No. . .It depends on the amount', that kind of thing. So, everything was still going as a debate. . .You try to get them to stop, and there's a point where the arguing just gets monotonous. You feel like you can't do this anymore.

Again, we see the long, persistent process of trying to persuade senior colleagues. Rather than leave, or give up, Maya kept trying. Explaining this in her interview, Maya described how she had always been conscious of 'doing everything she is supposed to do' even when working in previous firms. Finding her efforts fruitless, Maya eventually disclosed to law enforcement and worked undercover for several months, feeding information to the FDIC and FBI as they collaborated to build a case against the firm.

The women we interviewed described a strong compulsion to follow the rules and regulations of financial services. On one level, this was a normal part of their job; some women's professional positions centred on ensuring rules were followed – they were financial 'watchdogs' in the firm (Kenny, 2019). Isabel was a senior risk analyst, Maya was a compliance manager, while Joan was

a vice president in charge of fraud detection. In the case of Yvonne (who we present next) and Sophie, they did not work so closely with regulations but were still – on paper – responsible for rule-following.

Even so, each woman worked in an environment where even fellow watchdog colleagues appeared to be ignoring the rules. The women felt compelled to speak out about wrongdoing, despite the norms of their firm and even where commitment to rules required significant personal sacrifice including dismissal. Isabel described her persistence as something she is compelled to do because: 'as a simple employee, I just have a duty to do it'. Sophie recalls how the HR manager saw her as someone compulsively pursuing a point, telling her 'you can't stop saying. . .', with Joan and Maya experiencing similar drives.

In making sense of this, we see the parrhesiastic compulsion to follow one's sense of what is true, even if risk and –in the case of these women – sacrifice of their livelihoods, results (Alford, 2001, p. 76). Whistleblowers often describe their duty to uphold 'the highest ideals' of ethical practice (Alford, 2001, p. 80). These women were less interested in defending the organization as they found it – flawed and corrupt – but rather fought to restore it to an idealized organization founded on ethical practice, through their whistleblowing actions. In pursuing a felt parrhesiastic duty, the women utilized their technical skills and knowledge of fraud, risk and compliance, in order to speak out. *Tekhne* – professional skill – can combine with parrhesia in contemporary modalities of truth-telling (Foucault, 2011a, p. 24; Weiskopf & Tobias-Miersch, 2016). Both *tekhne* and compulsion shaped these women's experiences of speaking out as part of their self-constitution, part of who they were becoming.

(Gendered) retaliation

The formal positions of authority from which the women spoke out about wrongdoing were somewhat at odds with the responses they received while doing so. We saw above how, during the initial phase of speaking out and trying to persuade colleagues to adhere to the rules, responses could be patronizing and dismissive. As their attempts continued, reprisals grew more serious.

Yvonne held a senior executive position for over ten years at a national lending company in Ireland. She spoke out in public via a court appearance, in defence of a colleague who was being scapegoated for the transgressions of the CEO who had ignored lending rules, giving substantial mortgages to friends, journalists and political figures. Yvonne became known in her firm as a whistleblower. Retaliation ensued including verbal abuse, isolation and close monitoring. Somewhat surprisingly given the 'white collar' environment of the bank, responses were both physical and aggressive. Yvonne describes entering a room on one occasion:

> I held the door one day, and [CEO] slammed it back. I got the door full in my face.

Yvonne recalls another incident in which her CEO, coming in late, had scattered her belongings on the floor, just when the scheduled meeting was about to begin:

> I had to go around the floor and pick up all my paperwork, nobody helped me. They wanted to see me break. . .but I would never, ever.

Yvonne eventually resigned after months of isolation and harassment.

Reprisals often appeared to draw on gendered tropes. We saw above how, in the initial phase, claims of wrongdoing appeared to elicit responses from managers that depicted the women as infantilized, somewhat foolish. Isabel felt others saw her defence of the rules as 'petty and needy',

with needy being a common insult levelled at weaker women. Maya's concerns elicited responses from managers such as 'would you report *me*?', with a playful and dismissive tone that appears to deny or circumvent the seriousness of the allegation. Responses to Sophie, described above, were replete with gendered imagery; she had been told by the HR manager that she was 'tired' and needed to see a doctor. Her recollection of basic facts – Swiss account managers being present at events Sophie had herself organized – were contradicted and she was told to go home and rest, implying that she has simply misunderstood the gravity of the illegal practices she reports. Her CEO likewise diminished her written queries about her entire computer system being wiped out, saying 'you take things too seriously, you worry too much'.

Sophie recalled the CEO's later reaction to her disclosure. He jokingly opined that she was in fact 'jealous' of another woman working in the bank.

> It must be just a small technical bug. Don't worry. I think you're tired. Why didn't you come to tell me? You should have told me!. . .He also mocks my feelings, he refers to my 'moods' again: 'Are you having a little jealousy crisis?'

Sophie describes how the CEO was referring to a well-known cultural rivalry in banking between those who work directly with clients, and those engaged in professional support work like Sophie.

Isabel recalled how, as a mother as well as a senior risk analyst, she was not taken seriously when she spoke up about excessive client risk against the wishes of her organization. Before going to her direct manager's superior and the head director of the risk department, she had spent several months opposing her direct boss's approach to risk. During this period of escalation Isabel describes how her boss assumed that, as a woman and mother of four, she could more easily be frightened.

> My boss for all those years, he was pretty sure that Mrs. [Isabel's family name] just needed to be scared off a little bit. That she would go home to her four children, no one would ever hear about her again.

The interviewees described many other instances of apparently gendered retaliation. Some recalled how they would internalize this aspect of whistleblower reprisal. Joan reports how, as she persisted in speaking out, she felt demeaned and diminished in the eyes of the managers she had challenged – despite her position as vice president of fraud detection:

> I mean they just you know, when I was trying to fight back, they just looked at me like. . . 'yea, (laughs) just go ahead and try it!' Like I had no. . ..there was no way. . .they had it all. . .they held all the cards. They held every single card and they were cocky and arrogant about it, like I was nothing and I could do nothing. That they could do whatever they wanted and, you know, nobody like me was going to stop them.

Joan went on to describe the pain these responses invoked. Similarly, Sophie recounted how the extreme retaliation that followed her whistleblowing attempts gave rise to depression, insomnia and stress:

> At some point I felt like I didn't exist anymore, I felt my life was going off the rails, I felt harassed, bullied, I would cry all the time, a nightmare, an ocean of stress, crying and despair. . .relentless. . .I now explain the situation by the fact I knew too much, I was not part of the social circle, but I knew too much. . .cast out.

As Sophie notes, she was both an outsider and an insider. She was a rule-follower who knew too much.

Making sense of these accounts, it appears that regardless of the stage in their whistleblowing process, retaliation often involved belittling the woman speaking, using gendered tropes, including Isabel's weakness as a mother, or Sophie's alleged jealous disposition. This continued as disclosures escalated. As feminist organizational research shows, gendered troupes like jealousy, weakness and dependence can be used to control and silence women (Acker, 1990).

All interviewees were senior executives, but felt banished to a place that was at odds with how they were formally positioned in the organization, and how they envisioned themselves. Rather than an omnipresent, oppressive force, it seems that gender was mobilized momentarily, triggered by situations in which the subject appears both as transgressive speaker – as whistleblower – and also as a woman. These women are included and accepted in their organizations until this happens, but upon speaking out, they are violently excluded, with demeaning gendered tropes lying dormant in the organization's culture, exploding to the fore. The position in which they have been placed by others including senior colleagues meets the women 'by surprise. . .even with shock' as they are reduced, in the moment, 'to the status of children by the treatment they experience' (Butler, 1997a; Fotaki & Harding, 2018). They are 'surprised into gender'. It is the utterance of perceived 'truth' about wrongdoing by a female body that – in a single instance – appears to render even senior women into a diminished position of other, giving rise to gendered and deprecating responses.

An overwhelming sense of confusion and self-doubt is a common experience for whistleblowers, particularly for highly committed employees (Lennane, 2012). People can internalize the exclusions they are experiencing – exclusions apparently authorized by an organization to which they have been committed – turning these rejections inward on the self (Alford, 2001, p. 73, see also Kenny, Fotaki & Scriver, 2019). What we see here is that gendered reprisals can further exacerbate one's vulnerability to self-doubt and thus the stress associated with speaking up that is part of the whistleblowing experience. For example, Joan's depiction is rife with masculine imagery of aggression and domination. She felt she was seen as an entity who 'was nothing and could do nothing', disregarded by the 'cocky and arrogant' people in senior management, who felt they had impunity in how they acted and how they treated her. They perceived her as someone so weak that 'nobody like her' could possibly stand in their way; she was not even granted the status of an adversary. Gender, deployed as a weapon, can be insidious but nonetheless violent: 'When one's ideas are dismissed not because of their content but because of the body that articulates them, that body flinches and shrinks as it experiences the insult as if it were an act of physical violence' (Harding, 2003, p. 114).

Returning to the question of how gender and power intersect in parrhesiastic experiences, here we find women's self-construction as ethical truth-tellers to be shaped by risk, as they encounter whistleblower reprisal. This risk takes on a distinctly gendered flavour, departing from previous studies' findings. Violent, gender-based reprisals are as surprising as they are hurtful, representing a sudden shift in how the women see themselves and their place in the organization. Hierarchical status and professional experience are rendered somewhat irrelevant, in the face of a double exclusion: as woman and whistleblower. Enhancing understandings of how parrhesia manifests in contemporary organizations, we see that gender-based reprisals can be deployed in moments of interaction that evoke the markers of otherness, in order to silence women speaking out, even from positions of seniority. These experiences can be painfully internalized by the parrhesiastes who speaks.

Exclusion and persistence

It may appear likely that the force of such 'double exclusion' would foreclose the women's capacity to persist in their whistleblowing claims. Any protest against the gendered responses received

would likely be interpreted as a further sign of their lack of stability and credibility, thus further personalizing, pathologizing and discrediting their valid whistleblowing claims (Agostinho & Thylstrup, 2019; Kenny et al., 2019). However, our data shows something else: their persistence regardless.

The women continued escalating serious issues, using their past experiences and hierarchical standing as platforms from which to speak. They described their lack of faith that – despite many years in their industries and firms – they would find any help or support for their whistleblowing among colleagues or managers, and detailed the alternative sources of help upon which they drew. These included industry authorities and formal structures.

Maya's situation frightened her because, she felt, the corruption occurring left her vulnerable to prosecution.

> It [the corruption] scared me because I've been in banking for 28 years. I did not want to be in trouble for not reporting something when I should be, especially in BSA compliance, you know, the Bank Secrecy Act. I should be reporting what's going on and I wasn't allowed to. So, I got scared. [If found guilty as complicit] you can be prohibited from banking.

Prosecutions in this context are relatively rare, and the entire culture of Maya's organization was founded on an informal, tacit acceptance of this wrongdoing. None of her colleagues were afraid. Even so, despite working in banking 'for 28 years', Maya had no faith that she would be protected by the system and not be excluded from the industry. Regardless of the norms of complicity, Maya acted anyway, approaching an FBI investigator who believed her story and helped her to address the wrongdoing. For over a year she continued to work in her role while passing information to the government as they built a case against her firm. Maya describes how the fear and stress she felt during this phase was only alleviated when these authorities assured her that she had done the right thing. She recalls sharing her information and developing relationships with the regulators and investigators with whom she worked:

> I want to tell you; once I was able to talk to them, a huge weight was lifted off my shoulders.. . .You feel like they understood that you weren't the bad person in there, kind of thing. Just getting to tell somebody else, the burden was just lifted.

This external support was helpful in confirming that she was not 'the bad person', despite being excluded within in her organization.

Many women described similar experiences. Joan recalls the fear that stopped her from going public, even after she had been fired for her whistleblowing. She had a lot of information that supported her claims but was afraid to take on the bank by publishing her story in the newspapers. Offers of support from reputable journalists and lawyers did not assuage her concerns about the likelihood of becoming the target of a smear campaign by her firm, should she disclose publicly.

> At the point in time when I could you know, make [the wrongdoing] public, I was just too scared to do anything.. . .Before I had federal investigators look into it and say, 'this woman has credibility'. If I had said anything before that ruling [vindication in court], all [Bank] would have done is they would have just shredded me. They would have just made up a bunch of lies.

Joan had experienced significant retaliation while working in the bank and was fearful that her reputation would be further damaged. If blacklisted, other financial services firms would be unlikely to support her, or hire her. Joan felt that only federal investigators could properly justify

her actions, alleviate her fears and enable her to feel safe. Once she secured their help, she spoke publicly to newspaper journalists and on TV show, *60 Minutes*. Joan persisted and eventually succeeded in drawing public attention to the wrongdoing she had witnessed, with the ultimate collapse of her bank and her own vindication as a whistleblower.

Sophie likewise expressed certainty that her bank would try to scapegoat her for wrongdoing and that her colleagues would not protect her. Other women reported similar fears of being scapegoated and prosecuted if the wrongdoing was discovered, or of being excluded from practising in their profession because of blacklisting. They echoed a lack of faith that they would be supported by their colleagues should this happen.

Against these fears, women drew on their experience in their chosen field. Maya recalled her 28 years in banking. Isabel described how

> I have 20 years of experience. . .I sort of had references from the past, figures I knew as benchmarks, regarding limits not to exceed, equity ratios, and so on, basic knowledge that people don't have anymore. . . So, writing a negative opinion – it's just my job.

In interview, Isabel contests claims that she was courageous, by stating that it was her experience and knowledge that gave her both the motivation but also the strength to speak out.

At the height of retaliation she experienced, Yvonne found herself being once again bullied by senior colleagues. She was being scapegoated: blamed for her former CEO's decisions to lend money to customers who were clearly unable to repay, without credit checks or formal paperwork. Yvonne describes an incident with one of these managers:

> He was just ready to target me again, you know. . .because he used to do it in front of all the staff. . .really trying to belittle me. I just wanted to really irritate him now. So [the manager] was [saying]. . .'You did this wrong, you did that wrong' And I said 'How long have you been here?' And he said, 'three years'. I said, 'I've been here for ten years. I run this department, you're in the other department. . ..Can I give you a bit of advice now? Why don't you just get the hell out of here and go back up to your own department and do what you're paid for?' So, he went and reported it to [CEO].. . .You just had to get as ignorant [i.e. rude] as them. . .although it's not in my nature.

As did others, Yvonne found herself abandoning expectations of support and even fair treatment within her organization. Having become known as a whistleblower, she was experiencing the scapegoating for wrongdoing that others feared. In the face of this, she, like others, made use of experience and know-how to defend herself in the face of whistleblower retaliation.

Overall, these women whistleblowers had little faith that their seniority or status would provide effective shields against reprisal, and extant research suggests they may have been correct in this (Rehg et al., 2008). Instead they utilized the resources available to them in order to pursue their whistleblowing claims, and to counter the deep sense of exclusion they felt from colleagues and industry peers. These observations enhance understanding of contemporary organizational whistleblowing as parrhesia, by highlighting the position of the 'outsider truth-teller' in relation to sources of support. The ongoing project of self-construction as parrhesiastes was enhanced by reclaiming a sense of being valid, coherent and legitimate, from sources outside the organization, for example from federal investigators in Maya's and Joan's case. Personal professional experience formed a bedrock of self-validation for Isabel and Yvonne. As already noted, these resources provided the technical know-how and competence that is required for calling out major wrongdoing. But as we see here, in the face of deeply felt, internalized exclusions as a result of one's gender, these resources also provided a subjective sense of validity as legitimate speaker.

Discussion

Concluding his extensive analysis of parrhesia in Ancient Greece, Foucault invites scholars to examine contemporary settings, a project that organizational scholars continue (Foucault, 2011b; Munro, 2017; Weiskopf & Tobias-Miersch, 2016). As this study demonstrates, knowledge from the margins enriches this work, in our case via a focus on gender. This is so, 'not because certain subjects have a naturally more truthful disposition, but because of the conditions of existence that provide differential access to power and authority' (Hemmings, 2012, p. 155). We offer an in-depth examination of gender, power and status at the level of subjectivity, an area that is heretofore overlooked. Our study contributes to the question of how gender and power intersect in whistleblowers' experiences by elucidating professional *tekhne* as part of a compulsion to speak out, the violence of gendered reprisals occurring in momentary interactions that can be painfully internalized and, finally, the ways in which these experiences of 'outsider truth-telling' can give rise to the search for legitimacy and validation from novel sources, in order to persist. Parrhesiastic subjectivity is an iterative, becoming process. While scholars have examined the various ways in which whistleblowers risk violent exclusion because they break with norms of complicity to speak about impossible, taboo topics (Alford, 2001; Kenny, 2018; Stein, 2021), we see here how gender adds a further dimension to parrhesiastic risk: how it is encountered, internalized and subverted in complex ways.

Moving forward, the conceptual complexity inherent to this particular kind of outsider whistleblowing is critical to examine. Can these women be considered outsider truth-tellers (Maxwell, 2019)? After all they are Western, middle-class and relatively privileged. And they are senior – they possess hierarchical status and years of experience, both significant sources of formal power in contemporary organizations. Yet in the context of whistleblowing, the persistent diminishing of women's claims in the responses received from managers worked to counter this status and style them less-than-credible truth-tellers. Insights from readings of the *Antigone* are helpful here. As a woman, Antigone is always already excluded from the position of legitimate, credible speaker within the city. Thus a more formal status of political parrhesiastes (Foucault, 2011b) is foreclosed. She adopts a style of self-creation somewhat akin to Socrates' ethical parrhesia in her single-minded pursuit of truthful action (Contu, 2014), albeit as an outsider lacking Socrates' privileged status as both male citizen and person mandated by the gods to challenge interlocutors (Foucault, 2011a). Because Antigone persists regardless, her pursuit radically troubles the norms of the city of Thebes, breaking with expectations in terms of gender, law and obedience to authority. Moreover her act has political consequences, drawing public attention to oppressive norms (Honig, 2013).

Our findings show similar troubling. First, we saw women laying claim to an assertive, 'masculine' speaking position, counter to the wishes of their line managers, as they persisted in their whistleblowing claims. Prior to speaking publicly, these women repeatedly tried to persuade their managers to change. Eventually, however, they each abandon persuasion and make a more radical break. In so doing, all used their authority and status as a platform from which to speak out. In addition to active deployment of hierarchical status as a resource, we saw reworking of traditional norms of gendered behaviour. Observing retaliation against Yvonne that belittled her both physically (in scattering the papers and slamming a door in her face) and verbally (in accusing her of breaking the law), we see how she responds in kind, with aggressive and masculine language to match the tone and approach that has been used against her, asserting her longer tenure and experience, but also more direct verbal violence ('get the hell out of here and go back up to your own department') – even though, as she states, this is counter to her nature. These practices, of partially adopting, mimicking and citing patriarchal organizational power, reflect Antigone's implicit challenges to the king, as she gives her reasons from a position of relative weakness (Honig, 2013). Overall, these senior women whistleblowers move between subject positions of masculine and

feminine, subjugation and control. We see fluid movement refusing prescribed gendered positions, and refusing to be easily 'entombed' in the cave of gendered whistleblower reprisal.

As we noted, the emergence of parrhesiastic selves occurs in and through powerful norms, including gender. But, contra to extant research, while these are at times oppressive they are neither static nor all-encompassing. As *Antigone* shows, new possibilities open up as a result of the experience of radical exclusion (Harding, 2013). As somewhat illegitimate truth-tellers, women whistleblowers in male-dominated organizations are to some extent always already symbolically dead as was Antigone who, 'with her act, no longer occupies the social, familiar place where she used to belong' (Contu, 2014, p. 400). This death does not equate to political impotence; rather, the necessity to occupy multiple subject positions and to develop new ones gave rise to unprecedented opportunities for survival. Our study showed how, as disclosures escalated and reached the public domain, and reprisals became more serious, neither the organization nor the industry appeared to these women as likely shields against danger. Power acts on the subject to produce new positions even as it constrains (Butler, 1997b, p. 2), not least in the creation of oneself as ethical parrhesiast (Foucault, 2011a). Symbolically dead anyway, the women are free to make the allegiances they need to make; parrhesia becomes about partnering with law enforcers (Maya) or journalists (Joan). This resonates with Lida Maxwell's (2018) discussion of how outsider truth-tellers, excluded a priori, must find other ways of 'constitut[ing] power out of a position of powerlessness' in order to speak and be heard (p. 37), a process involving creating a 'community of responsive listeners' (see also Vandekerckhove & Langenberg, 2012). For these financial services whistleblowers, radical gendered exclusions elicited just such a search.

We contribute to scholarship on organizational whistleblowing and parrhesia, by extending extant theorizing via a feminist lens focused on subjectivity. For outsider truth-tellers in organizations, oppressive norms do not operate as stable structures. Nor can power be assumed from occupying a position in the organization's hierarchy, but rather these dynamics move and shift. In the constitution of parrhesiastic selves, this can enable the possibility of a 'reconfiguration and transformation of the existing modus operandi' (Contu, 2014, p. 401; see also Harding, 2013). The precise contours of this reconfiguration cannot easily be defined in advance. Rather, this emergent figure of 'outsider truth-teller' can only be surmised to point to somewhere new, 'to the political possibility that emerges when the limits to representation and representability are exposed', as feminist readings of *Antigone* suggest (Butler, 2000, p. 2 in Contu, 2014, p. 402).

Even so, the particular manifestations of power and gender in parrhesiastic scenes can not easily be read from the sex of one's body. Extant whistleblowing research tends to represent gender as tied to sex. But as we see here it is critical to examine how gender discourses operate beyond simplistic categorizations based on bodily characteristics. Power dynamics within organizations can manifest in a variety of gendered ways; the reprisals experienced by the senior women whistleblowers cannot be reduced to a male-female dynamic; Sophie's HR manager was after all a woman. Beyond this study, we observe that male bodies – including those of whistleblowers – can be placed in the position of the feminine, even as female subjects adopt traditionally 'masculine' styles of assertive speech. While norms can be troubled, however, it is clear that the sex bodies are perceived to have does make a difference. Retaliation is often shaped and influenced by the gendered (or sexed, raced or classed) body of the whistleblower. Going forward, the important task is to examine specific and local intersections of power dynamics at play in whistleblowing situations in which the speaker is rendered other, and bodies are part of this.

We propose a refinement of Maxwell's concept of outsider truth-teller. She develops the idea of a 'hierarchy of truth' structuring who counts as truth-teller and who is left out (Maxwell, 2018, p. 37). This study suggests that, while valuable, nuance is required. As the situation of senior female whistleblowers demonstrates, the boundary between outsider and insider is, in practice, both

porous and ambivalent. Future studies will usefully examine dynamics across different boundaries, as power and subjectivity are problematized in new scenes of organizational parrhesia. Finally, as Foucault himself notes, language is power, so a future examination of the impacts of his ambivalent interpretations of gendered parrhesia will be critical (cf. Maxwell, 2018).

Conclusion

In this article we elucidate the theoretical possibilities offered by Sophocles' *Antigone* for understanding the interactions of gender and power in organizational whistleblowing settings. The framing offers a rich and fruitful way to enrich existing understandings of whistleblowing practices. Moving forward, we propose that this opens a door to studies of outsider truth-telling in a variety of organizational settings. We welcome future research into parrhesiastic speech from the variety of margins that encase the norm of Western, white, male, middle-class organizational leaders, including differential positions of sexuality, race, ethnicity and class. This work is critical if we are to extend understanding of whistleblowing beyond dominant paradigms.

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Note

1.   An established two-person method of risk checking.

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