

Grandy G, Lewis P, Mavin S. [Homage to Professor Ruth Simpson](#). *Gender in Management: An International Journal* 2017, 32(7), 454-460.

Copyright:

© Emerald Publishing Limited 2017.

DOI link to article:

<https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-07-2017-0087>

Date deposited:

13/11/2017

PRE-PUBLICATION VERSION
GUEST EDITOR INTRODUCTION: A HOMAGE TO PROFESSOR RUTH
SIMPSON

Gina Grandy (University of Regina, Canada)
Patricia Lewis (University of Kent, England)
Sharon Mavin (University of Roehampton, England)

On June 14 of this year we organized a BAM Gender in Management Special Interest Group seminar to celebrate the contributions of Professor Ruth Simpson as she embarks on her ‘official’ retirement. We use the term ‘official retirement’, rather than simply retirement because given Ruth’s ferocious appetite for learning and extensive ongoing research commitments she is nowhere near ready to retire from the academy. The event was hosted by Roehampton Business School, University of Roehampton in London. Nearly 40 people attended and participants travelled from as far as Canada, Dubai and Nigeria to learn about, reflect upon, and celebrate Ruth’s substantial impact. This special issue marks out invited pieces by six scholars as they reflect on Ruth’s impact on their own careers and on gender and management studies.

The five pieces in this special issue all speak to the richness of Ruth’s work as an exceptional academic; an academic committed to the integrity of the research process, shared meaning making and collaborative ingenuity, and writing excellence. The authors also speak intimately about the richness of her mentorship, spirit for life, and friendship. We see through their pieces how Ruth’s contribution is measured not only by the quality of her research, but also her character. The authors’ work demonstrate the breath and depth of the impact of Ruth’s work; contributions to gender and management that span such areas as dirty work, meritocracy, careers, management education, qualitative research methods, and emotion and embodiment.

In what follows we reflect on our key takeaways from that day in June and more broadly on what we have learned from our dear friend and exceptional scholar Professor Ruth Simpson. We also provide a summary of the articles featured in the special issue. Read on and we hope you enjoy.

A CLEAR STORYLINE

“Identifying your argument in a ‘golden sentence’ and carrying that storyline through your entire piece are central to successful academic writing” (Ruth Simpson at the BAM special event, June 14, 2017)

All authors in this special issue mention Ruth’s disciplined approach to writing. Ruth has delivered countless workshops to doctoral students and staff on the art and craft of academic writing and sharing her insights on what it requires to write for 4* journals (Simpson, 2016). At those workshops Ruth delineates how writing as conversation takes into account rigour, originality, significance and knowing your audience. One has to be sure your conversation is fitting for the audience for whom you are writing. At the BAM event Ruth shared with us that good writing doesn’t just happen, it is the result of

dedicated practice and reflection. For Ruth, having clarity about your storyline and your argument - captured in what Professor Mustafa Ozbilgin, previous editor of *British Journal of Management*, refers to as the 'golden sentence'- are essential. Carrying that golden sentence consistently throughout our written work, from the abstract, introduction, literature review, methods, findings, discussion and conclusion, seems at first glance pretty simple, but the practice of it isn't always easy or common. This is a useful technique for us all to keep in mind.

Further, tight writing with clear and concise sentences is something Ruth pushes herself and others to achieve. She expressed that a 'clean' sentence or paragraph can take considerable concentration and multiple revisions. In Cloutier's (2015) piece on the writing practices of academics, Ruth's insights are shared by a number of other exceptional scholars such as Karen Golden-Biddle, Martha Feldman, Kevin Corley, Bob Hinings, Denny Gioia, and Paula Jarzabkowski. "Good writing is essential to good theorizing" (Cloutier, 2015: 2) and Cloutier (2015) argues that good writing requires devoted practice. Practice is "a term we associate easily enough to music but tend to forget when it comes to writing. Practicing implies improvement. It involves becoming conscious of one's practice, a deliberate effort to improve" (Cloutier, 2015: 13). For Ruth, writing is a disciplined and necessary practice. We take great inspiration from her commitment to excellence as an academic writer.

In Pullen and Ross-Smith's piece in this special issue, Alison talks about the eloquence of Ruth's writing and how she is able to balance "taking risks whilst managing to conform to the practices of the discipline" (insert **p.? from special issue**). For us, this is an intriguing feature of Ruth's exceptional writing. Tracy (2012) critiques what she views as an ethical concern perpetuated by mainstream 'quality' journals – the requirement for inductive researchers to conform to the deductive practices required for mainstream journals. In that piece, 'The Toxic and Mythical Combination of a Deductive Writing Logic for Inductive Qualitative Research', Tracy (2012) notes "a deductive writing process distracts both author and reader from the context, among the most salient and important parts of an inductive ethnographic study" (p.121). While Tracy (2012) does not explicitly advocate for feminist writing, her critique of deductive writing is similar to that which grounds feminist thought and principles (e.g., a desire and commitment to providing space for marginalized voices in ways that adequately account for context, iterative theory building and writing differently). Ruth is able to engage with and write about the experiences of marginalized persons and groups and bring to light silenced debates and voices in ways that are 'true' to feminist principles. She does this successfully within what feminist scholars might view as the hegemony of taken for granted masculinity underpinning expected practices of deductive writing logic.

COLLABORATIVE ENGAGEMENT

The three of us have worked collaboratively with Ruth in a number of ways: as co-authors, co-editors, co-external examiners, and contributors to each others' books. New, emerging and well-established scholars comprise Ruth's collaborators. And she treats them all the same – generous of her time, responsive and respectful, and yet uncompromising in her pursuit of scholarly inquiry that challenges herself, others and the

academy. Her collaborative network is impressive and her commitment to each and every one of us is admirable. Her collaborative relationships span several continents and include such countries as Canada, United States, Nigeria, Dubai, Australia, China and of course the United Kingdom. Collaborative research can serve as a source of stimulation and creativity, and it also provides intellectual companionship in what can often be an isolating experience (Katz and Martin, 1997). In a similar way, Ruth's view is that collaborative inquiry ignites fresh perspectives, healthy debate and dialogue, reciprocal learning, and novel conceptual and empirical insights. We are fortunate to be part of her collaborative community.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE DEPTH AND BREADTH OF RUTH SIMPSON'S CONTRIBUTIONS

All of the contributors to this special issue skillfully weave personal memories and reflections within accounts of Ruth's significant scholarly contributions. In the end they have crafted pieces that recognize Ruth's positive impact on their lives and careers, the lives of those with whom she engages as part of her research endeavours, and the field of gender and management more broadly. In the articles that follow in this special issue, Afam Ituma shares with the reader what has become a lifelong collaborative relationship and friendship with Ruth. In his piece "Gender, Feminization and the MBA: A Review of the Contribution of Ruth Simpson" Afam tell us about how his relationship with Ruth began as a PhD student under her supervision at Brunel University. That relationship evolved into a fruitful collaborative partnership resulting in numerous journal publications. What we also learned from Afam at his presentation at the BAM June event is that the impact of their relationship reaches beyond professional success. Afam shared with us that his daughter Ruthie, is named after Ruth and that Ruth is her godmother. This is a vivid reminder to us how she deeply touches the lives of those with whom she collaborates.

In his piece, he goes on to highlight Ruth's contributions in the areas of careers and the MBA, and the feminization of the MBA. He traces Ruth's original work on the benefits of the MBA for men and women in the UK, through to subsequent international comparative studies in Canada and China. Moreover, he discusses how in her work on the feminization of the MBA, Ruth makes a significant contribution in her *Academy of Management Education & Learning* (2006) article. Afam commends Ruth's call to action for business schools to "embrace a wider MBA orientation that accommodates the qualities associated with femininity as well as a critical reflection on the nature of the dominant masculine values to address the demands of modern management. This she argues would create a more relaxed learning environment for women and more potential for 'transformations' among men" (insert P.?? from special issue).

Savita Kumra also makes note of Ruth's contribution to our understandings of the careers, learning and the MBA. She first met Ruth at Cranfield where Ruth was delivering a presentation about her research on Chinese students who completed MBA in the UK. The focus of Savita's article to the special issue is to outline for us their substantial collaborative work (with each other and with others) on meritocracy. In "Really Saying Something; Exploring Conceptions of Merit in Women's Experience of Career Based Tensions Inspired by my Friend Ruth Simpson", Savita highlights how

their work serves to challenge merit as stable, objective and absolute and re-conceptualize it as both unstable and contingent. Together they have conceptualized the embodied nature of merit and theorized that merit is not always recognized and does not always 'stick' to certain bodies marked by gender, class and race. In their most recent work, they are extending this further to consider merit as performative, specifically "how merit is 'brought to life' through embodied performance" (insert p# from special issue).

In her account on merit and women's careers, Savita makes reference to Ruth's collaborative work with Patricia and Anne Ross-Smith, two other contributors to this special issue. Patricia is a co-editor of this special issue, as well as a contributing author. In "Visibly Different from the Academic Norm": An Appreciation of the Scholarship and Friendship of Professor Ruth Simpson", she summarizes for us their joint contributions in the area of normativity as it relates to management and entrepreneurship. In this intriguing piece Patricia reflects on four of their collaborative pieces and shares with us key insights on voice, visibility, and the (in)visibility vortex. Their work brings to light the fragility of the masculine norm and how in management and entrepreneurship the norm (and those privileged by it) is always at risk and that it requires constant securing. Inclusion and exclusion in relation to the norm is always marked by tension and struggle. She suggests that the (in)visibility vortex "can help us challenge the claims of postfeminism that gender inequality has been 'solved' and is not longer a concern for today's women" (insert p.?? from special issue).

We would also be remiss not to comment on how two of us (Sharon and Gina) still laugh aloud as we think about Patricia sharing some of her more personal memories about their long-time relationship at the BAM event in June. At the BAM event in June (and in her piece here), she described how at the persuasion of Ruth and another colleague, Patricia willingly placed herself into a packing box outside their office to 'see if she would fit' and then to be pushed down the hall. Such memories speak to the nature and strength of their relationship, and how Ruth is a serious and incredibly productive scholar, yet also has an infectious sense of humor and playful spirit.

Yet, another area where Ruth has made a significant impact is in the area of dirty work. Natasha Slutskaya recounts how she was struck by the "rigour and elegance" (insert p.?? from special issue) of Ruth's presentation and the skillfulness of her writing at an EGOS conference in Berlin. Natasha's collaborative partnership with Ruth centers upon dirty work and masculinity. In her piece in this special issue, 'Dirty Work, Masculinity and Giving Voice Through Innovative Qualitative Methods: Ruth Simpson's Contributions', Natasha reflects on Ruth's act of writing, and their innovative theoretical and empirical work that draws upon novel qualitative methods (e.g., visual methods) with men butchers and refuse workers. We see that Ruth's impact on gender and management encompasses gender (considerations of masculinity and femininity), as well as class. Moreover, her work accounts for how the insidious nature of power as it relates to gender and class have implications for both women and men.

In the final piece of the special issue, Alison Pullen and Anne Ross-Smith engage in a conversation where they reflect on their pasts and present with Ruth in "Professor Ruth Simpson, Sydney Ruth and Gendering Management". They illuminate both Ruth's seriousness as an academic and her playfulness as they recount their first encounters with Ruth, her multidisciplinary contributions to gender and management, their ongoing collaborations with Ruth, and their unforgettable memories during her times spent in

Australia. Of particular note are their reflections on Ruth's theoretical and empirical impact in the areas of masculinity and men in feminized work, how her insights mark out paths for the future of gender and management (see for example Broadbridge & Simpson, 2011), her influence on key journals in the field, her embodiment of feminist values, and her advice (and lived practice) of staying close to the data during data collection and analysis. The conversation between the authors illuminates the rigour and scholarly significance of her contributions. It also reminds us of how her collaborative engagements are marked by mutual respect and curiosity and that there are many layers to her intersecting identities (e.g., intellect, traveller, humanist, feminist, mother, friend, athlete), all of which inform who she is as an intriguing human being and remarkable scholar.

CONCLUSIONS: A PERSONAL NOTE

As you prepare to read on and enjoy the pieces in this special issue, we leave you with a transcript of Alison Pullen's presentation from the BAM event in June. It was an innovative, personal and fun-loving account summing up Ruth's contributions as a scholar, colleague and friend. Alison, thank you for allowing us to share this with the readers of *Gender in Management: An International Journal*.

Ruth Simpson's Steps for Advancing Critical Scholarship in Management and Organization Studies

(Alison Pullen, by Skype, at the BAM special event, June 14, 2017)

R stands for reflexivity. A central feature of Ruth's work is an ability to challenge taken for granted assumptions and norms. We see this worked through her empirical analyses, methodological contributions and her ability to challenge the gendered norms in which we work, write, think, be. As we reflect on Ruth's contributions we can trace the ways in which she continues to challenge the masculinity that underpins our profession, labour, ways of writing and scholarship. And, Ruth shows us how to do it differently. Ruth embodies this challenge by working differently and by refuting the seductive mechanisms that draw us into such established practices in the university.

U is for underdogs. In her fieldwork, Ruth has identified people often overlooked in our field. Her work on butchers, street cleaners, men in feminized professions all search for issues that are often underrepresented in the mainstream literature. I was delighted when her search for the next under-explored populations was Sydney tattoo artists and invited me to join her on the project. Here we learned what it was like to be the underdog – white, middle-class women professors; one of us with a posh accent, the other with a feather duster in a plastic shopping bag. We had fun but we also experienced high levels of discomfort which forced us to connect in new ways that we hadn't before.

T is for tattoos. How many of us would have tattoos for the purpose of getting better data? I will leave Ruth to share her tattoos and if she doesn't we have short videos of the evidence. Ruth is so much fun to be around, she definitely makes me feel boring!

H is for honing in on the masculine nature of management; the nature of gendered leadership and the MBA in some of her early work. In her *Academy of Management Learning and Education* paper from 2006, the challenges posed against the masculine logic and structure of the MBA is still as refreshing as it was then. Calling for the feminization of the MBA and exposing the failure

of critical management education, Ruth exposes the masculinity of the MBA. For those of us in business schools we know that we have a long way to go to challenge current practices. Ruth has done this in her own teaching.

S stands for Sydney Ruth. Many of us in Sydney have loved having Ruth around. Your energy, wisdom and lust for fun is infectious. We missed you this year Ruth and wait for your return. We hope to celebrate your contributions to the GWO journal at next year's conference in Sydney. Good coffee – one shot with hot milk on the side? Did I get this right? Sun, strolls, Sydney streets. Beaches, tennis, travel and The Dendy. Great food, Ruth is the only guest that I have ever had who volunteered to babysit!

I is for intimacy. Working with Ruth I have experienced first-hand the intimate ways in which Ruth engages with the data. This intimacy is reflected in the data produced between the relationships developed in the field. Ruth often surfaces the vulnerable and personal. These examples give insight into the nature of the relationships developed. Nick a nurse said:

I often compare myself with my brother who is making million pound deals and he's earning money for his company and I tend to feel when I compare myself with him, I tend to feel emasculated really because he's a big, city fat cat and would be sat around with a big cigar talking money and I talk about buying more mattresses to enable patients to be more comfortable and it feels kind of soft and unimportant compared to what he's doing.

Ruth is an expert, honest interviewer who can embrace people not like her. From the tattooist data, one of my favourite piece of talk from an artist talking about working on a living canvass talking about pain and blood: "Yeah, sometimes they bleed a lot, you have to slow down and let the bleeding subside. Oh yeah, they scream, yeah." You can just picture Ruth with these guys! And, Ruth is ALWAYS on the lookout for dirt, dirty work!

M is for masculinity. Ruth has made an enormous contribution to the field of men and masculinity. The ways in which Ruth has offered sustained critique of the gendered nature of organizations and the role of men as tokens in changing organizational landscapes. Her 2005 *Gender, Work and Organization* piece is a fine example of a body of influential work on men in non-traditional occupations and the role strain they face. These studies provide insight into men's lived experiences and also shows how theory is built from empirics.

But, M is also for Mother. Ruth has shown me in my early days of being a mother about having realistic expectations and about having the necessary resilience that needs to come with such a lifelong adventure. Ruth is a proud and fabulous Mother and I have learned so much about the tensions we face combining home and work. But importantly Ruth opened my eyes to the past and the ways women like herself worked so hard for their rights and the rights of others.

P is for professors in parlours constantly challenging our own comfort zones. And, P is for passion, perseverance and the personal. Ruth lives her work and her work is personal to her. And, and P is for POSH. As Ruth often asks: Do I sound posh? In Sydney, Ruth sounds posh. But P is also for power and privilege and the ways in which Ruth undoes structural, cultural and interpersonal privileges in her feminist practices.

S is for social practice. Due to Ruth's skillful crafting, our *Human Relations* paper is extremely well cited for an empirical gender paper and this reflects Ruth's commitment to challenging gender binaries and illustrating these ideas through lived experience, such as the gendered nature of careers, and the gendered impact of organizational change. In the *Human Relations* paper, we discussed men as other and the undoing of gender in terms of doing masculinity and

appropriating femininity so that masculinity is partially subverted and partially maintained. Ruth's work as a whole shows both the force of masculinity that is difficult to challenge but also the fragility of masculinity. Ruth's work testifies to the importance of illustrating gender performance through embodied, affective relations of people at work. Ruth's writing will continue to make visible the gender denial in various workplaces.

O is for 'on the ball'. As a teacher Ruth has turned many students around. In her 'master' classes at Macquarie, Ruth influenced research students in ways that they will remember. As a reviewer and editor Ruth has been a colleague who has shaped the fields of work and organization, management, organization studies and gender studies. But, Ruth is for ONLY RUTH who works and lives her values, strong feminist values that guide her scholarship, leadership and friendships in the field. When I think of Ruth I think of trust, care, empathy, generosity, reciprocity, agency, kind, fun, etc. etc. And, this is why we want to be around Professor Simpson.

Finally, **N is for no more time**. Ruth is a very special person with skills and sensibilities that many of us fall short of. Ruth's lasting contribution on our field is made possible because of who she is. Ruth has demonstrated that the personal is political. Ruth has shown me how to listen as well as question, to have collective as well as individual agency. Ruth has supported me in many ways. Ruth - you and your work will be cherished. Ruth leaves a mark that will remind me that it is essential for women to work differently together – and to live differently too.

In sum, we would like to thank the contributors to the special issue and BAM event on June 14. And of course, we thank you Ruth for your friendship and sustained contributions to gender and management – you are an inspiration to us all.

REFERENCES

- Broadbridge, A. and Simpson, R. (2011) 25 years on: reflecting on the past and looking to the future in gender and management research. *British Journal of Management* 22(3), 470-483.
- Cloutier, C. (2015) How I write: An inquiry into the writing practices of academics. *Journal of Management Inquiry* 25(1), 69-84.
- Katz, J.S. and Martin, B.R. (1997) What is research collaboration? *Research Policy* 26(1), 1-18.
- Simpson, R. (2006) Masculinity and management education: Feminizing the MBA. *Academy of Management Education & Learning*, 5(2), 82-193.
- Simpson, R. (2016). Publishing for success: 4* quality papers. *Writing workshop slides by Ruth Simpson*, Brunel University.
- Tracy, S. (2012) The toxic and mythical combination of a deductive writing logic for inductive qualitative research. *Qualitative Communication Research* 1(1), 109-141.