

Editorial

Exhausted Women: On Discomfort and Practice of Science in Contemporary Times



Mulheres Exaustas: Sobre Incômodos e o Fazer Ciência na Contemporaneidade

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ABSTRACT

The exhaustion faced by academics served as the starting point for this special issue – edited, written, and reviewed exclusively by cis and trans women. We understand exhaustion as a consequence of historical and daily battles for gender equality, aggravated by the burden of reproductive work. Thus, even when exhausted, we accepted this challenge out of the conviction of the political role necessary to open spaces in the face of a masculine logic of science production. This editorial was structured based on recognizing the importance of producing, identifying, and living with the challenges necessary to disrupt oppression. These challenges come in the form of (1) bringing together female editors, authors, and reviewers from different regions, academic backgrounds, and diverse representations; (2) time, which revealed itself as an instrument of domination and gender violence; (3) the operationalization of the contradiction in producing an edition exclusively for women, considering the male logic of practicing science. This edition should be read as a pedagogical instrument to visualize the challenges experienced, and it is a call for collective responsibility in the fight to create space in everyday life, specifically in the academic field. Finally, if we are to combat injustices, we must provoke daily discomfort, and this edition set out to do just that.

Keywords: gender equality; women; reproductive work; contemporaneity.

RESUMO

A exaustão enfrentada por acadêmicas serviu como ponto de partida para esta edição especial – editada, escrita e revisada exclusivamente por mulheres cis e trans. Entendemos a exaustão como consequência das batalhas históricas e cotidianas pela igualdade de gênero, agravada pelo ônus do trabalho reprodutivo. Assim, mesmo exaustas, aceitamos este desafio pela convicção do papel político necessário para abrir frestas frente a uma lógica masculina de produção da ciência. Este editorial foi estruturado a partir do reconhecimento da importância de se produzir, identificar e conviver com incômodos necessários para desestruturarmos opressões. Foram eles: (i) o desafio de reunir editoras, autoras, pareceristas mulheres de diferentes regionalidades, trajetórias acadêmicas e representatividade; (ii) o tempo, que se revelou como um instrumento de dominação e de violência de gênero; (iii) a operacionalização da contradição em se produzir uma edição só de mulheres considerando a lógica masculina de se fazer ciência. Temos a convicção de que esta edição deva ser lida como um instrumento pedagógico de visibilização dos desafios vividos, e mais, trata-se de uma convocação para a responsabilidade coletiva na luta pela abertura de novas frestas na vida cotidiana e especificamente no campo acadêmico. Por fim, se é necessário combater injustiças, se torna iminente provocarmos incômodos cotidianos, e foi isso a que essa edição se propôs.

Palavras-chave: igualdade de gênero; mulheres; trabalho reprodutivo; contemporaneidade.

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Cite as: Guimarães, L. V., Oltramari, A. P., Maca, D., Ferraz, J. M., Oliveira, J. S., & Sarayed-Din, L. F. L. (2023). Exhausted women: On discomfort and practice of science in contemporary times. *Revista de Administração Contemporânea*, 27(5), e230201. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-7849rac2023230201.en>

Published: September 21, 2023.

When [Evaristo \(2007\)](#) wrote, “Our writing-living (*escrevivências*, in portuguese) cannot be read as a bedtime story for those in the big house, but rather to disturb them in their unfair sleep” ([Evaristo, 2007, p. 21](#)), she was warning us about the importance of producing, recognizing, and living with the discomfort necessary to disrupt oppression. If it is necessary to combat injustices, it becomes imperative that we provoke daily discomfort. ‘Discomfort’ is perhaps the first word that comes to mind when we discuss the creation of this edition.

Exhaustion was the discomfort that brought us together and led us here. ‘Exhausted Women in Contemporaneity’ is the theme of this special edition of *RAC - Journal of Contemporary Administration*, published by ANPAD – Brazilian Academy of Management. It was edited, written, revised, and published by exhausted cis and trans women scholars. Exhaustion was chosen as the focal point because we understand it to be one of the long-standing consequences of the historical and daily struggles we have undertaken in pursuing gender equality in society ([Onuma et al., 2022](#)). We live in Brazil, where women dedicate almost twice as much time to domestic and caregiving tasks as men ([Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística \[IBGE\], 2022](#)). In this same country, a woman is murdered every six hours simply because of her gender. This pattern of oppression toward women is also evident in the academic environment.

‘Discomfort’ aptly describes the sensation of confronting certain statistics within academia. According to Capes – the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel, a foundation within the Brazilian Ministry of Education, even though 54.5% of those enrolled in master’s and doctoral programs are women, 65% of the authors published in this journal are men. When examining gender equality within the context of careers, an even more pronounced disparity emerges. Despite women earning 51% of doctorates between 1996 and 2014, the increase in the number of women holding teaching positions during this same period was a mere 1%, as reported by the Higher Education Studies Laboratory (LEES) at Unicamp.

According to data from Brazil’s National Council for Scientific and Technological Development – CNPq, men request the majority of productivity grants awarded by the council and they hold 64.4% of CNPq productivity grants, while women hold 35.6% ([Cunha et al., 2021](#)). Specifically in the field of administration, in 2021, men held 71% of research productivity grants, while 29% were allocated to female researchers ([Cunha et al., 2021](#)). **Twenty-nine percent:** does that not cause you any discomfort? Indeed, it is a stark reminder that women occupy less than a third of the research productivity grants in our field!

In addition to these data, it is crucial to consider the intellectual femicide and scientific epistemicide that we

endure when we are overlooked, thereby eliminating the opportunity to be included in bibliographical references for administration programs. We may also face silencing in citations and references in research within our field. After all, being cited stands as one of the primary indicators of productivity (established by men!) for the allocation of research grants (managed by men). The evaluation criterion often relies on publishing articles in scientific journals, the editorial boards of which, for the most part, are composed and overseen by men. Simultaneously, these citations serve as a measure for assessing the quality of professional performance (of women) within academia.

It is necessary to reflect on the extent to which scientific production in the field of administration has standardized academic experiences and organized its modes of production to perpetuate this masculine paradigm ([Oliveira & Camargo, 2021](#)). This operation not only ensures the predominance of cisgender, heterosexual white men in positions of decision-making power but also dictates what should be published, how it should be done, when and where it should happen, and who has access to resources. It is grounded in the subjugation of academic knowledge and practices as the foundation for upholding the existing status quo. In other words, we assert that our exhaustion is also a consequence of the harm inflicted upon us by the dissemination of pedagogies of white masculinity ([Oliveira & Camargo, 2021](#)).

Our exhaustion arises because when we speak of violence, we acknowledge that our identities and dignity are diminished. This should not only concern women but also trouble men. We must not normalize the fact that capitalist modes of production (including science) continue to hinder women, individuals with non-binary gender identities and expressions, those who have undergone gender reassignment, Black people, and indigenous peoples from accessing resources and subject them to constant evaluation, criticism, and punishment based on criteria that were not created by us and do not benefit us. In addition to the assembly-line approach that governs the timelines and actions of the publishing market, we must also scrutinize various aspects of practicing science, such as the format of citations, references, and the H-index. We should question: What are their purposes? By examining and theorizing these dynamics of oppression and exploitation within academia, we can identify and construct alternative organizational frameworks that encompass epistemological, theoretical, and methodological dimensions where oppressions are not inherent aspects of their constitution.

Masculinity and femininity are, above all, historical and ongoing processes. It is up to us to align with the relationships perpetuating the logic of oppression and exploitation or to resist and fight against it, as we aspire to do with this edition. Take a moment to reflect on your role in

relation to the people who share your life. Perhaps the articles published here can assist you on this journey.

Contrary to how you may have interpreted this editorial so far, it is not a case of a Manichean division between men and women. Instead, it is an expression of oppression driven by exploitation, which has positioned men in dominant roles in social production. Women have been assigned the role of re(producing) life: taking care of the household, preparing food, raising children – tasks often considered ‘less important,’ as the productive labor is reserved for those deemed destined for greatness: men. As Vogel (2022) explains, “the ruling class, in order to stabilise the reproduction of labour-power as well as to keep the amount of necessary labour at acceptable levels, encourages male supremacy within the exploited class” (Vogel, 2022, p. 340). In other words, the relationship is far more complex and deeply rooted in the capitalist mode of production.

We firmly believe this issue can serve as a pedagogical tool for shedding light on the discomforts experienced, creating a rupture in the established paradigm of practicing science. Much like water slowly erodes small fissures in rocks, eventually destabilizing structures, the space we—women and editors—are opening extends far beyond the mere compilation of articles on the subject. We perceive and utilize this visibility platform to broaden the conversation beyond the pages of this issue. With the call as our guiding thread, we have created opportunities for live discussions and provocations on social networks and have organized a panel at ANPAD. Therefore, despite our exhaustion regarding the logic around practicing science and being in the world, we accepted the challenge of producing this special issue because we recognize the vital political role we must fulfill.

Returning to the discomfort, particularly that feeling of unease tormenting those who act ethically or justly, contemplating the creation of an organization comprised solely of women presented a significant challenge. The assembly of female editors, authors, and reviewers from diverse regions, academic backgrounds, and diverse representations makes this special issue truly distinctive. There are no previous records of coordinated editing and evaluation carried out exclusively by women. In the 26-year history of the journal, no woman has held the position of editor-in-chief (a situation not unique to this journal). By establishing a rule beyond the discourse of merit, which is deeply ingrained in the male-dominated practice of science, we not only encountered resistance from some colleagues but also grappled with internal tensions. Ironically or even oppressively, we faced questions about our exhaustion while working in the editorial office, often from male colleagues who implied that we should not be in this role. Simultaneously, we recognized the use of irony as a tool of oppression. However, we again reaffirmed the significance

of maintaining this space and highlighting the weight of women’s daily experiences.

Time was also a challenge in the creation of this issue. If time is an essential category for contemplating work in contemporary society, it has highlighted how it can be an instrument of domination and gender violence. Recall the IBGE (2022) data we presented at the beginning of this text, indicating that women dedicate more than twice as much time to household chores and caregiving. This is why we often require more time for reading, writing, evaluating, and publishing articles. Beyond the binary notions of feminine versus masculine or man versus woman, the discomfort tied to standardized timeframes for organizing an issue, evaluating work, and producing scientific responses unveil the distinct logic to which we are subjected: a masculine mode of operation. In the editorial process, this is manifested in rules, metrics, and numbers that result in time control, disregarding all other aspects of care and the sustenance of life. These previously overlooked dimensions are no longer trivial and expose the violence embedded in the imposition of this particular understanding of time, which disproportionately affects women.

As Piedade (2017) has taught us, our shared pain unites us – this is what she refers to as our *dororidades*¹. The discomfort caused by the organization of this edition and the time constraints have led us to face challenging situations. The most accurate definition of *dororidades* is the shared experience of being women shouldering responsibilities in the realm of life’s reproduction, dealing with a double burden, physical and mental exhaustion, while also having to demand from other women adherence to deadlines, deliveries, and a certain level of dedication to bridge gaps. The operationalization of this contradiction – producing an edition exclusively for women within this unique operational framework – compels us to highlight the numerous challenges inherent in our work in the editorial offices of scientific journals.

Among these challenges, the following stand out: (a) the intensity of work and deadlines, which were challenging to synchronize with other equally pressing activities related to editorial work; (b) providing thoughtful responses to authors; (c) the difficulty in finding reviewers; (d) the inherent contradiction between producing scientific work and criticizing the academic productivism.

Regarding the challenge of ‘the intensity of work and deadlines,’ the call for papers was open for 15 months, which we recognized as a necessary departure from the standard call duration in our field. This extended timeline allowed more time for authors to submit their articles and provided ample time for the review process and feedback to authors. In essence, the entire editorial process embraced the concept of care work, which had previously been invisible, as a crucial aspect of academic production. Another commitment made

by the editors was to ‘provide thoughtful responses to authors.’ This commitment resulted in articles undergoing multiple rounds of review, with some requiring up to five reviews to ensure comprehensive feedback. Regardless of the approval for publication, we recognized and acknowledged the effort put into each submission.

The issue of voluntary peer review work at conferences and journals, which serves the publishing market, has already been a topic of discussion throughout the chain that supports scientific production, both in Brazil and worldwide. While we will not delve into this issue here, it is important to recognize the financial dynamics that underlie article production, evaluation, and publication. RAC’s structure is entirely voluntary, free of publishing charges, and without fees for accessing the published articles. When we decided to implement a peer review process with only female reviewers, we encountered the challenge of asking women to shoulder an additional burden beyond their traditional duties in the academic sphere. These women needed to carefully allocate their already limited time, understanding that engaging in the publication process as voluntary reviewers might not directly contribute to their academic careers. Hence, ‘the difficulty in finding reviewers.’

The issue of availability is closely related to the challenge of prioritizing the work proposed by women on their own agendas. This is a pedagogical practice that the field of feminist studies has imparted to us. Historically, patriarchy has institutionalized women’s agendas based on demands rooted in male logic and reproductive labor. Since the concept of servitude has been imposed on us as the foundation of our existence, dismantling masculinity as the guiding rationale of our actions becomes a vital undertaking for women. This entails recognizing ourselves as agents of will and as beings

within a realm of possibilities that extends beyond the condition of acceptance imposed upon us.

Finally, as Lorde (2020), has taught us, prioritizing other women in organizing our daily lives posed a significant challenge in assembling this edition. Here, we learn that it is indeed possible to place ourselves as a priority, allowing our (re) existences to be grounded in the choices we make, including the power to say no. We are coming to understand that this challenge does not stem from the supposed domination of women but from rejecting a logic rooted in masculinities. This hierarchical, violent, and binary construction of masculinity has historically cast femininity and women as positions of vulnerability and insecurity, with no existence beyond accepting imposed norms. In this process, we learn that, apart from our exhaustion, we have another vision for society and the scientific field – one where domination does not serve as the foundational element. We have a vision where gender violence is not a pedagogical practice, and women can exist within a realm of possibilities, with the freedom to choose ourselves as a priority.

As Elza Soares sings in the song *Mulher do Fim do Mundo* (Woman of the End of the World): “Woman of the end of the world, I am. I am going to sing until the end!” May we indeed be women of the end of the world because, as Megg Rayara de Oliveira states in the text published in this issue: “Exhausted, but standing! Standing until the end of the world!”

NOTE

1. *Dororidade*: No translation. Neologism created based on the Portuguese word *dor*, which means ‘pain.’ *Dororidade* is a feminist concept coined by Brazilian writer Vilma Piedade (2017). It refers to the pain that unites Black women beyond *machismo*.

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Typesetting and normalization to APA standards: Eduarda Pereira Anastácio (ANPAD); Kler Godoy (ANPAD, Maringá, Brazil); Simone L. L. Rafael (ANPAD, Maringá, Brazil).

Frequency: Continuous publication.

Circulation: Free open access to the full text.

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