

## Call for Papers

## Toward a Critical Study of Boundaries in and around Organizations

## Guest Editors:

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*“This ‘bordering’ of possibilities constitutes in actuality not a limit but a threshold that rewrites community as a reciprocal relation of contact and exposure.”*

*Gkertzou, 2014, p. 25*

Recent scholarship continues to show how workplaces accumulate and perpetuate intersecting inequalities related to gender, race, class and other axes of difference (Amis et al., 2020; Romani et al., 2021; Van Laer et al., 2021). A core element in the reproduction of these inequalities are processes of social group formation involving boundary drawing (e.g., Heracleous, 2004; Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Langley et al., 2019). As a ‘cut’ separating inside from outside, drawing boundaries creates access to or exclusion from privileges and social status (Dobusch, 2021). Whether boundary drawing is explicit, in cases of in-group/out-group labels, or implicit, in the lack of recognition or social invisibility of out-group ‘others’, it is connected to forms of inclusion and exclusion that have important consequences for the (re)production of intersecting inequalities (Dobusch, 2017; Van Laer et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, extant literature on organizational boundary making (cf., Langley et al., 2019; Ybema et al., 2012) has highlighted that boundaries are fluid and provisional and that organizational members negotiate boundaries to construct particular identities. Yet, this focus on individual agency underestimates the unequal distribution of the ability to draw and deconstruct boundaries. For instance, the sexualization of women in certain branches of the service sector collapses the boundaries between personal and working life without the individual consent of the women workers (Brunner & Dever, 2014). The nature and experience of boundaries is thus always politically charged (Glimmerveen et al., 2019), not only involving power inequalities related to social identity categories such as gender, disability, ethnicity or race but also organizational politics around departmental, professional and hierarchical contests (e.g., Azambuja et al., 2022; Bucher et al., 2016). Nevertheless, studies of boundary making rarely take into account the political processes by which organizational boundaries construct, stabilize or contest structures of power and related intersecting inequalities (cf., Essers & Benschop, 2009; Sage et al., 2016; Van Laer & Janssens, 2014).

Acknowledging inequalities and political processes, it becomes evident that power struggles over access, and the privileges and advantages inclusion bestows, shape boundary drawing

and fixing. Consequently, boundary drawing is caught up in, for instance, gender, class and race relations and is part of the micro-politics that constitute asymmetrical social orders (Pereira, 2019; Shirley, 2010). These orders are more generally shaped by contextual understandings of 'difference' and 'normality' that reflect and reproduce historic discourses and entrenched social, geopolitical, and economic inequalities (Van Laer & Zanoni, 2020). A very recent example is the blurring of boundaries between work and home due to the COVID-19 outbreak and governmental lockdowns, affecting predominantly mothers and primary caretakers in juggling the increased childcare and work duties (Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta, et al. 2021). As a result, being caught on the 'wrong side' of a boundary can reduce opportunities for material prosperity and social recognition (Johansson & Lundgren, 2015) and even the acknowledgement of one's full humanity (Haslam, 2006). When applied to the construction of economic barriers, gender and racial exclusions, or geopolitical frontiers and margins, processes of boundary drawing can even have life or death consequences that have until now been largely absent from the organizational literature on boundaries.

At the same time, the feminist literature reminds us that notions of 'borderline discourse' mark the limits of discourse, the possibilities of poetics, and the irruption of the body from the symbolic order (Kristeva, 1983). This means that boundary drawing is ambivalent, and may be used to resist the reproduction of inequalities. Boundaries can protect as well as lockout (Ferreira, 2005), enable as well as constrain (Hernes, 2003). For example, boundaries can be established to create 'third spaces' for alternative ways of being (Islam, 2015), and can enable – even constitute – forms of inclusion. As boundaries being ambivalent they can also offer protection from the powerful, offering spaces of safety for those in positions of vulnerability (e.g., in cases of sexual harassment). Attempts to promote organizational inclusion may insist on boundaries (for instance, certain forms of equal opportunity policies), critiquing forms of 'diversity-blindness' as cynically disavowing existing inequalities (Apfelbaum et al., 2012). Yet, scholars have also noted that the reification of boundaries may lead to essentializing group differences (Wilton et al, 2019), trapping subjects in categories that deny them agency (Dobusch et al., 2021). Faced with the devil's bargain of ignoring versus essentializing differences, actors must find new ways to navigate boundaries to promote the development of diverse – yet interconnected – forms of life (Bridges et al., 2021; Plotnikof et al., 2022). Such navigations of ambivalence require sensitivity to the different shapes and effects of boundaries depending on their porosity, their visibility and their malleability (Azambuja et al., 2022).

On the whole, boundaries are thus central to understanding processes of inclusion and exclusion. Furthermore, boundary drawing requires resources (discursive, economic, symbolic,) such that struggles over boundaries channel struggles over resources in complex ways. This Special Issue aims to contribute to grounding a critical literature around organizational boundaries by providing a platform to further discuss these ambivalent roles and effects of boundaries. We are particularly interested in contributions that focus on the way boundary drawing in and around organizations relates to forms of inclusion and exclusion by exposing questions of power: Who is in a position to draw, resist and contest boundaries? Who benefits and suffers from these boundaries?

Hence, this special issue of *Gender, Work & Organization* calls for contributions to advance theoretical, empirical and methodological understandings of the relationship between

boundaries and forms of inclusion and exclusion, with an emphasis on the critical, social and power-laden aspects of boundary drawing within organizations. We welcome submissions from multiple epistemological and disciplinary orientations, drawing a 'wide boundary' around the theme of boundaries. Thus, we invite submissions that challenge and expand the boundaries of our thinking about boundaries, placing us on the threshold of new ways of thinking about boundaries, a space of possibilities.

Possible research questions for the SI include, but are not limited to the following:

- How to theorize and systematize different approaches towards boundaries? How do different onto-epistemological stances impact our understanding of boundaries and boundary drawing?
- How do different kinds of boundaries (e.g., related to gender, ethnicity, class) intersect to (re)produce inequalities and what are the possibilities for resistance moments to work across such boundaries?
- How do HR policies and diversity management practices draw, negotiate or reinforce boundaries around and across workplaces?
- How can boundary drawing act as a tool of management, its governmentality and relation to normative control?
- What kinds of internal and external boundaries are just and/or desirable in organizations?
- Under what circumstances does resistance to exclusionary boundary drawing create new classes of excluded groups and new minorities?
- Can leadership play a role in challenging exclusionary boundaries and promoting equality, and if so, what kinds of leadership?
- How does micro-level boundary drawing at the level of everyday practice relate to macro-level boundaries, such as the militarized borders of sovereign states or the structural borders between social categories?
- What are the political stakes around recent discourses challenging inclusion and re-establishing boundaries that appeared to have become more fluid, such as right-wing nationalism, anti-feminist discourses, discourses against trans-rights or discourses challenging so-called wokeness?
- How do wider social discourses and ideologies such as neoliberalism, consumerism and meritocracy impact on organizational practices aimed at upholding or removing exclusionary boundaries?
- How are (e.g., global or historic) boundaries (re-)drawn by management to exploit different groups of workers?
- What are the political stakes around recent discourses of inclusion, in terms of "inclusion IN what" and "inclusion FOR what ends"? On what implicit and explicit forms of boundary drawing do these discourses rely on?
- How are boundaries between human and non-human actors drawn, and what are the political stakes of resulting distinctions (e.g., culture-nature, human-machine)?
- What are the forms of innovative engaged methods to study boundary drawing and its intersection with inclusion/exclusion dynamics in and around organizations?
- What are positive effects of boundary drawing? Do inclusionary forms of boundary drawing show inherently different qualities than exclusionary forms?

## Submission Instructions

Submissions should be made electronically through the Submission System:

<https://submission.wiley.com/journal/gwao>. Please refer to the Author Guidelines at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/14680432/homepage/forauthors.html> before submission.

Please select the 'Original Article' as the article type on submission. On the Additional Information page during submission, select 'Yes, this is for a Special Issue' and the relevant Special Issue title from the dropdown list.

For questions about the submission system please contact the Editorial Office at [gwooffice@wiley.com](mailto:gwooffice@wiley.com).

For enquiries about the scope of the Special Issue, please contact Stephanie Schreven ([s.schreven@dundee.ac.uk](mailto:s.schreven@dundee.ac.uk)) and/or Laura Dobusch ([laura.dobusch@jku.at](mailto:laura.dobusch@jku.at)) directly.

## **Deadline for Submission: 31 August 2023**

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