ORIGINAL PAPER

Mitigating Stakeholder Marginalisation with the Relational Self

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Abstract

Stakeholder theory has been an incredibly powerful tool for understanding and improving organisations, and their relationship with other actors in society. That these critical ideas are now accepted within mainstream business is due in no small part to the influence of stakeholder theory. However, improvements to stakeholder engagement through stakeholder theory have tended to help stakeholders who are already somewhat powerful within organisational settings, while those who are less powerful continue to be marginalised and routinely ignored. In this paper, we argue that one possible obstacle preventing less powerful stakeholders from speaking up and/or being heard by organisations is found at the ontological level, where we have identified an 'essentialist self' underpinning the stakeholder concept. By deconstructing the stakeholder concept through how it is defined, discussed and debated, and linking this back to the practical consequences of the theory for the least powerful stakeholders, we are able to make three contributions. One, through our deconstruction, it is clear that at an ontological level, stakeholder theory is underpinned by an implicit, and problematic, assumption of the 'essentialist self', where the organisation is treated as the 'natural, universal self', and anyone not closely resembling this narrow (and unrealistic) view of self is treated as 'other'. Two, we build on the work of authors such as Wicks et al. (Bus Ethics Q 4(4):475–497, 1994), who highlight the need for consideration of the self within stakeholder theory. We thus take our findings from contribution one and begin to build a more holistic view of the self within the stakeholder concept, where each self is encouraged to recognise common selves outside and inside the corporation. Third, we link the theoretical discussion to the practical by discussing some imperfect ways in which a more holistic, enriched stakeholder concept might begin to help mitigate marginalisation for some stakeholders.

Keywords Stakeholder theory · Marginalisation · Relational self

A Story of Marginalisation

'On 7th March 2001, environmental groups Palani Hills Conservation Council (PHCC) and Greenpeace exposed mercury bearing waste glass dumped by [Hindustan Unilever Limited] at a local scrap yard. Demonstrations by local people at the factory site forced its closure, and the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) issued a notice to the company to refrain from carrying out any activity at the plant site. The Board also disconnected the water and electricity supply to the factory' (Bhargava et al. 2003, p. 1).

Despite continued disagreement on the appropriate standard for Unilever's clean-up efforts (Unilever PLC 2016b; Environmental Justice Atlas 2018), and debate as to when Unilever became aware of the workers' health concerns (2001 during the protests or 2006 when workers filed a petition for financial compensation on health concerns in the High Court Bhargava et al. 2003; Unilever PLC 2016a), it is clear that repeated attempts to engage with Unilever on the issue of financial compensation were routinely ignored (Nath 2015).

This was however until 30th July 2015, when Sofia Ashraf posted a rap bringing attention to the mercury poisoning in Kodaikanal. By 4th August 2015, the video had already gone viral, with more than a million views (BS Web Desk 2015),

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and the first of four tweets regarding Kodaikanal appeared from Unilever's account.[1] The next day saw a tweet from the personal account of Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever.[2] Eight months later, on 9th March 2016, Unilever and workers reached a settlement 'on humanitarian considerations'. The company agreed 'to provide ex gratia payments to 591 former workers/association members and families'. '[F]ormer employees confirmed this as a full and final settlement of all their claims and demands' and agreed to 'withdraw the petition they had filed in February 2006 in the … High Court' (Unilever PLC 2016a).

Why did it take Unilever 10 years (15 according to locals) to meaningfully engage workers and come to a decision about compensation? Legal liability is still debated but if humanitarian grounds were appropriate in 2016, surely they were appropriate in 2006 and in 2001? This is especially vexing given that Unilever is often considered to be a leader in CSR and sustainability as demonstrated by the list of awards and recognitions on their website.[3] Clearly power is a key factor shaping the situation both to (un)intentionally ignore the needs of a less powerful group, or to bring a huge multinational to the table. But given that power is the primary, or only, characteristic of stakeholder salience in the minds of managers (e.g. Parent and Deephouse 2007), how do we get beyond this so as to include distal stakeholders (Ahen 2017), who powerful or not, are directly and significantly impacted by an organisation?

Introduction

Management literature increasingly acknowledges that organisations are not islands of activity, and must relate in some way to the social and natural systems in which they operate (e.g. Wicks et al. 1994). Organisations are depicted as relating to stakeholders, who are often defined as those 'who can affect or [are] affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives' (Freeman 1984, p. 46). It is therefore through stakeholder theory that we come to understand why, how and with whom organisations relate.

Stakeholder theory is an incredibly powerful tool for understanding and improving organisations, and their relationship with other actors in society. It helps us to do such things as rethink what an organisation is (e.g. Clarkson 1995), reframe its role within society (e.g. Freeman 1984), and to justify why the organisation must look beyond itself to remain relevant (e.g. Mitchell et al. 1997). That these critical ideas are now accepted within mainstream business is due in no small part to the influence of stakeholder theory.

We agree with Dmytriyev et al. (2017, p. 392) 'that the meaning of an idea is measured in its practical consequences,' which would indicate that for many stakeholders, the practical consequences of stakeholder theory have made material improvements in their lives. But our concern lies with the remaining stakeholders, such as the Kodaikanal workers, *who continue to face significant and direct adverse consequences from organisational activity and who struggle to make their concerns heard by organisations.*

Improvements in the lives of stakeholders through stakeholder theory tend to help those who are already powerful within organisational settings, while those who are less powerful continue to be marginalised and routinely ignored. As Parent and Deephouse (2007) illustrated so clearly in their empirical work, managers view the salience of stakeholders as based primarily on power, followed by urgency and legitimacy. If the meaning of an idea is measured in its practical consequences, then it suggests further refinement of stakeholder theory is needed so as to extend meaningful engagement beyond those who already wield sufficient power that enables them to be heard within organisations (e.g. Khan et al. 2007; Jensen and Sandstrom 2011; Kujala et al. 2017).

In this paper, we argue that one possible obstacle preventing less powerful stakeholders from speaking up and/or being heard by organisations is found at the ontological level, where we identify an 'essentialist self' underpinning the stakeholder concept. By deconstructing the stakeholder concept through how it is defined, discussed and debated, and linking this back to the practical consequences of the theory for the least powerful stakeholders, we make three contributions.

One, through our deconstruction, it is clear that at an ontological level, stakeholder theory is underpinned by an implicit, and problematic assumption of the 'essentialist self', where the organisation is treated as the 'natural, universal self', and those not closely resembling this narrow (and unrealistic) view of self are treated as 'other'. Separating the self and other results in the other being devalued and marginalised relative to the self. Within stakeholder theory, we find stakeholders are treated as 'other' and legitimately devalued relative to the organisation, who is viewed as 'self'. Two, we build on the work of authors such as Wicks et al. (1994, p. 483), who highlight the need for consideration of the self within stakeholder theory, a self that they suggest 'extend[s] into areas far beyond what we can easily recognise and into areas clearly 'outside' the corporation'. We thus take our findings from contribution one and begin to

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[1] Twitter thread (https://twitter.com/unilever/status/628581316972388352).

[2] Twitter thread (https://twitter.com/paulpolman/status/629124033716559873?lang=en).

[3] Unilever's Sustainable Living website has a list of awards and recognitions for their sustainable living work, with multiple awards in 2015, 2016 and 2017, indicating that their treatment of the workers at Kodaikanal did not significantly challenge the view of them as a leader in the area. Website https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/sofia-ashraf-takes-unilever-head-on-with-her-kodaikanal-video-115080400694_1.html.

build a more holistic view of the self within the stakeholder concept, where each self is encouraged to recognise common selves outside *and inside* the corporation. Third, we link the theoretical discussion to the practical by discussing some imperfect ways in which a more holistic, enriched stakeholder concept might begin to help mitigate marginalisation for some stakeholders.

This paper is organised into four sections. The first highlights a growing concern over continued stakeholder marginalisation in practice and within the stakeholder literature. The second section uses insights from feminist thinking to delineate what is meant by an 'essentialist self', its implications, and the alternative of the 'relational self'. The third section demonstrates evidence of our deconstruction to illustrate that the stakeholder concept is underpinned by the essentialist self, and the implications this has for devaluing stakeholders relative to organisations. The final section begins to enrich the stakeholder concept based on a relational self, and considers some early steps that may be taken to bring an enriched stakeholder concept into practice.

A Concern

There is no question that organisational engagement with stakeholders is improving all the time. We only need look at annual reports and websites of organisations to see ever more discussions of stakeholder engagement activities. It is also true that the proliferation of social media has provided the opportunity for some stakeholders, who historically may not have had sufficient power resources, to now be heard by organisations (e.g. Miles and Mangold 2014). Our concern is not for these stakeholders who are able to change the power dynamic between themselves and an organisation, often by availing themselves of changing organisational attitudes, practices and global communication technologies. Rather, it is for those even more marginalised stakeholders who are unable to exploit these resources, and thus struggle to speak out and be heard by organisations, despite being significantly and directly impacted by them. Derry's (2012) shipbreakers are an excellent example. So are the Kodaikanal factory workers or community members surrounding Texaco's Lago Agrio Oil Field in Ecuador who are facing serious health impacts (McAvoy 2010), or the polar bear killed for injuring a guard during a wildlife tourism event in the Arctic Archipelago organised by Hapag Lloyd Cruises (Associated Press 2018). These are but a few of the many examples where marginalised stakeholders have been significantly and directly impacted by an organisation's activities, but where there is very little evidence that their existence was even considered—that is until a more powerful stakeholder took up the issue. Looking back to the Kodaikanal case, factory workers languished for years with little engagement on the

possibility of financial compensation until Ashraf brought her experience of using social media for protest (Iyer 2015) to bear on the case. In so doing, she enabled a change in the power dynamic between the community and company by threatening Unilever's reputation.

Much discussion about the power asymmetry between stakeholders and organisations suggests that an organisation can use its substantive power resources 'to exploit its leverage and refuse attempts to modify its behaviour' (Dawkins 2014, p. 285). Less powerful stakeholders are then forced to 'rely on the benevolence and voluntarism of the firm's management to satisfy their demands. In many cases, stakeholders without direct power have to rely on the advocacy or guardianship of other, more powerful and more salient, stakeholders if they are to be heard' (Fassin 2012, p. 88). Reducing these asymmetries can be achieved by stakeholders improving their ability to speak out, such as through alliances (e.g. Bendell et al. 2010), or through ways of being heard within organisations, such as changes in organisational practices (e.g. Barrientos et al. 2016).

However, it is also possible to argue that stakeholder theory, *by design*, (un)intentionally attempts to mitigate power asymmetries between organisations and stakeholders. If 'a stakeholder approach to business is about creating as much value as possible for stakeholders, without resorting to trade-offs' (Freeman et al. 2010, p. 28), and if this explicitly assumes that *all* stakeholder interests are accommodated through *joint, not conflicting*, interests (Freeman et al. 2010, p. 27), then those who had historically not been heard, now by definition, have *joint* interests in organisational activity that need to be accounted for. Whether organisations are motivated to engage stakeholders for reasons including (but not limited to) protecting reputations, maintaining social legitimacy and moral obligation (e.g. Freeman 1984; Wicks et al. 1994; Phillips 1997), does not change the fact that engagement for any reason shifts the power dynamic, allowing at least a minimal opportunity to be heard. And here we come full circle—the idea of stakeholder theory is for 'a business firm to bring together employees and customers, suppliers and distributors, investors and communities and other actors in society … [to increase] the value of the investment made by owners, but also [to fulfil] the needs and expectations of various stakeholders'[4] (Freeman et al. 2017b, pp. 1–2). The practical consequences for those with strong and consistent power resources is often positive, but for those with fewer resources and who also face direct and significant impacts, the practical consequences, or value created, is often negative. We are not alone in our concern over the practical consequences of stakeholder theory for the

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[4] Square brackets used to change tense of words, not to change words used in original text.

most marginalised, and its broader implication for the field of CSR more generally.

A Shared Concern

A small but growing minority within the literature view mainstream approaches to stakeholders and stakeholder engagement (including corporate social responsibility) as struggling to meaningfully address the inclusion of stakeholders in organisational processes (e.g. Orts and Strudler 2009), less powerful stakeholders in particular (e.g. Derry 2012). In addition to the many practical examples mentioned above, the continued marginalisation of different groups is well documented within the literature.

Van Buren and Greenwood (2008) for instance analyse 20 years of literature to demonstrate employee loss of voice through the decline of unions in Australia and the US, and the resulting inequality in bargaining power. Using company reports, Grosser (2009, p. 298) illustrates that 'there is little evidence of systematic consideration of gender issues in [C]SR, despite the development of principles on inclusivity and completeness'. Even more troubling is Starik (1995) who argues that rather than just marginalised, the natural environment is incapable of speaking out. 'Since only humans have been perceived to possess and exercise political-economic power and legitimacy, that is, to organise boycotts, negotiate contracts, impose fines, or file lawsuits, only humans have been considered stakeholders' (Starik 1995, p. 209). This absence and/or continued marginalisation of these and many other groups including local community (Fig. 2007), suppliers (Tallontire 2007) and farmers (Glover 2007), provides compelling evidence that while improving, the practical consequences of stakeholder theory indicate a need for further refinement of the theory to deal with the salience of less powerful stakeholders.

This concern with the practical consequences of stakeholder theory for marginalised stakeholders is echoed within corporate social responsibility. There is a growing concern that mainstreams CSR approaches, which virtually always have stakeholder engagement as a core concept, are perceived as *contributing to, rather than challenging*, problematic assumptions in mainstream organisational research. Banerjee (2008, p. 70) for instance, challenges the legitimacy of the field by suggesting that much of what is done in the name of CSR and development is 'inherently undemocratic… where peasant populations do not have the right to decide how they want to live'. Blowfield is similarly concerned for workers and local communities in the South. He argues that many of their concerns challenge the very nature of capitalism (such as questioning the 'universal good of free trade' 2005a, p. 520), and thus attack values deemed 'non-negotiable' by organisations. As a result, their views are ignored in stakeholder discourse. Fleming

and Jones go further to suggest that the structures on which the global capitalist system is based 'transpose most gestures of responsibility – including sustainability and stakeholder dialogue – into something of a farce' (2013, pp. 1–2).

Their farce is a shared concern over the practical consequences for many less powerful stakeholders that is relatively unchanged through existing CSR and stakeholder engagement efforts. While it is indeed true that some marginalised stakeholders can benefit through stakeholder engagement processes (see for instance Freeman et al. 2017a), it is also true that less powerful stakeholders often remain on the margins, as demonstrated above.[5]

Feminist theorists working within the stakeholder and CSR literatures also raise similar questions about the ability of mainstream stakeholder approaches to deal with stakeholder marginalisation (see for instance Borgerson 2007; Coleman 2002), and this work creates an important foundation for our contributions.

A Foundation

Feminist work in stakeholder theory tends to be in the socialist tradition (see Table 1) since it demonstrates, often implicitly, the hegemonic masculine assumptions underpinning the stakeholder concept (e.g. Liedtka 1996). "Hegemonic masculinity" describes a set of practices and characteristics, perceived to be embodied typically by men that have a disproportionate and privileged influence on social relations (Connell 1995). This critique helps us to understand why groups embodying presumed masculine characteristics, such as competitiveness and rationality, are much more likely to be in a position of significant influence relative to other groups. Three key works within the management literature usefully link aspects of the self/other concept originating from feminist theories, with our understanding of stakeholders. These three works, supported by the broader literature,

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[5] Most of us will be unsurprised by this statement, especially given that particular traditions within CSR and stakeholder theory could be described as 'uncritical' (Willmott 2013). For instance, the business case/strategic view of CSR and an instrumental view of stakeholder theory, are often criticised for being too managerialist in nature (e.g. Bondy and Matten 2012; Phillips et al. 2003). The idea of win–win, where stakeholders have their concerns met and organisations improve their profitability/competitive advantage through engagement with each other, is strongly based on the business case/strategic/instrumental view (Porter and Kramer 2006, 2011). This view has been the one that tends to find its way into 'practitioner friendly' journals, and be represented far more often within in organisational rhetoric (Bondy et al. 2004). However, both literatures also include traditions that are self-reflexive, seeking to better frame the importance of organisational alignment with society in a way that challenges narrow assumptions of such things as profitability and competitive advantage as primary goals for organisations (e.g. Frynas 2005).

are thus the foundation on which our own contributions are built.

Wicks et al. discuss hegemonic masculinity within stakeholder theory and explore the 'most egregious examples of masculine metaphors which have come to shape our thoughts about business and the stakeholder concept' (1994, p. 478). Collaborating, communicating and collective action with stakeholders are, they argue, not only increasingly introduced into organisations, but are important in counteracting the negative impacts of the masculine metaphors. They even go so far as to suggest that 'the individual and the community, the self and the other are two sides of the same coin and must be understood in terms of each other' (1994, p. 483). In this way they provide a critical piece of the foundation by noting, in principle, the importance of the self in stakeholder theory. By also suggesting that the 'boundaries of the self extend into areas far beyond what we can easily recognise and into areas clearly 'outside' the corporation' (1994, p. 483), they encourage us to think more broadly about what the self might look like and with whom it connects, but did not elaborate any further on these comments within their own work.

Early attempts, such as Wicks et al. (1994), are important in that they demonstrate the usefulness of employing feminist concepts and analysis techniques in stakeholder theory, and bring our attention to the existence of the concept of self, but where their own delineation of the self is limited.

More recent work in the management literature usefully employ the idea of hegemonic masculinity in investigating such things as women on boards (Bear et al. 2010), glass cliff effects (Ryan and Haslam 2005), pay inequality (Sayers 2012) and the implications of incivility on gender relations (Cortina 2008), but does not engage further with the self/other concept with one important exception. Freeman and Auster (2011) build on the work of Wicks et al. (1994) by explicitly critiquing one component of an essentialist self found in management literature—static values—opting instead for what they call the poetic self which they view as a 'project of self-creation, rather than a static entity that explains why we do what we do' (p. 20). This acknowledgement of the problems associated with assumptions of stasis within the self provides another critical component of the foundation. They bring to light the existence of the essentialist self and suggest improvements to a self composed of static values through improved interconnections between people and increased introspection. While only a partial view of the essentialist self, they make the connection between self and other, providing some initial steps, and a foundation, for a more robust investigation of the self within stakeholder theory.

Grosser and Moon (2017) provide a third important piece of the foundation by arguing the need for much greater use of feminist theories within the CSR/stakeholder theory domain given important overlaps between the two disciplines. Feminist theories tend to highlight the cognitive and epistemological dimension of gender, as a social process (Grosser et al. 2017), and these epistemological foundations impact on various strands of the CSR literature such as workplace diversity and inequality (Grosser and Moon 2017). CSR and feminist disciplines thus not only share important issues, but also influence each other at the epistemological level in terms of how these issues are treated. Thus, we agree with Grosser and Moon on the non-homogenous character of feminist perspectives on gender, in terms of its epistemological foundations and methodological approaches adopted. However, if we are to take feminist thinking seriously, as they suggest, we argue that the ontological foundations of the relational self in feminist theory are bound to change beyond gender, which in turn affect the ontological foundations of the self in stakeholder theory.

Given the history of discussion and debate within feminist thinking regarding the self, the next section provides a description of what is meant by the essentialist self and relational self, along with implications that these different selves have for what Freeman et al. (2010, p. 29) would call 'real live complex human beings'. In this way, it is possible to see why and how our finding of an essentialist self within stakeholder theory is relevant to our concern over the practical consequence of marginalisation, and how adopting a much more holistic relational self is part of the solution in reducing marginalisation.

A Critique and a Way Forward

Tong (2014) indicates that 'feminist thought resists categorization into tidy schools of thought. *Interdisciplinary, intersection* and *interlocking* are the kind of adjectives that best describe the way we feminists think' (2014, p. 1, emphasis in original). Table 1 shows different traditions in feminist thinking and the explicit concern over views of the essentialist self that have carried forward through time. In the latest transnational wave, gender crosses national boundaries (Pearson 2007), but also historical boundaries with its take on post-colonialism (Barrientos et al. 2003). As a result, an all-encompassing relational self, based on debates surrounding assumptions of an essentialist self, is emerging across traditions to form an atemporal and aspatial dynamic self with multiple selves and who let common selves with others to be part of oneself over time. We thus begin with the essentialist self.

Table 1 Feminist perspectives of the self

Feminist perspectives	Epistemological perspective[a]	Ontological assumption of the self	Examples	Main intellectual influences
Liberal	Male/female biological endowment	Essentialist	Williams (2003)	Neo-classical economics
Radical	Women as oppressed "class"	Essentialist	Gilligan (1982)	Sociology/political economy
Psychoanalytic	Introspection of men and women about their gender influenced by social male domination	Relational essentialist self	Butler (1990) and Nelson (1992)	Psychology/feminist economics
Socialist	Intersection of sex, race, class power relations and sexuality	Multiple selves	Namaste (1994), Nash (2008) and Connell (1995)	Sociology/political economy
Poststructuralist/postmodern	Sex/gender as social discourses constituting subjectivities of the material aspects of human bodies	Multiple selves within an atemporal dynamic self	Coleman (2002), Walby (2011), Young (2011) and Ybema et al. (2009)	Psychology/sociology/political economy
Transnational/(post)colonial	Complex subjectivities going beyond Western conceptions of gender	Multiple selves within an atemporal and aspatial dynamic self	Barrientos et al. (2003), Pearson (2007) and Charles (2012)	Transdisciplinary/development studies

[a]Adapted from Grosser and Moon (2017)

A Critique: Assumptions of the Essentialist Self

According to the feminist literatures, traditional views of the self, often referred to as the essentialist self (Ybema et al. 2009), stem from the enlightenment and are still found in much mainstream thinking (Flax 1987). This view of the self comes under scrutiny for three connected reasons; one, there is a presumption of the self as a free and rational agent that ignores the relational components of who we are and how we define ourselves; two, these traits associated with the self (e.g. rationality) are preferred to other possible traits (e.g. connectedness) and are thus valued more highly while the others are devalued; and three, these traits associated with the self are assumed to be the domain of men (Benhabib 1992).

In traditional Western thinking, the concept of man is associated with autonomy, independence and rationality, whereas the concept of woman is associated with relationships, connectedness and subjectivity (Nelson 1992). These characteristics often hold as 'natural facts' (Flax 1987), where men embody such things as freedom and rationality as an extension of being a man, whereas women embody such things as connectedness and interdependence as an extension of being a woman (Gilligan 1982). Based on this view, we can understand the essence of 'man' or 'woman' through these 'natural facts'. They tell us what it means to be man or woman beyond differences in biology (Budgeon 2014). Given that in contemporary Western societies we tend to value such characteristics as rationality and independence, over connectedness and interdependence,

it allows us to legitimately prefer those embodying highly valued characteristics—men—and marginalise those with poorly valued characteristics—women (Warren 1990). Thus the deconstruction of this essentialist view is fundamental to understanding the problematic nature of gender relations where 'man' is perceived as the 'universal, natural self' and 'woman' is devalued as 'other' (Flax 1987).

In the remaining critique, we focus on two fundamental problems of the essentialist self most relevant to our later discussion of the stakeholder concept. The first problem is that the essentialist self does not reflect the lived experience of most people regardless of their self-identified gender. With categorizations like those mentioned above, the self cannot move between sides of the dichotomy (e.g. man or woman) without risking marginalisation (Butler 2004). For instance, transsexual and transgender people do not fit neatly into one or the other side of the dichotomy during some, or all, of their lives (Doan 2010). It is also quite clear that not all women can be described as connected, interdependent and/or subjective, nor all men rational, independent and/or autonomous (Yuval-Davis 2006). Thus, these traits are neither 'natural' (Flax 1987), nor demonstrative of the essence of man or woman, but reflect the social experience of the gender dichotomy. Walby (2011, p. 12) goes further in arguing that gender is linked to its 'social formation' [which] is constituted by the institutional practices in the four domains of economy, polity, violence and civil society'. She thus argues that the boundaries of gender are not confined to one geographical space given the wider overlap of these four dimensions.

If we broaden our discussion to include characteristics often assumed to exist within the category 'man' or 'woman' such as sexual orientation, race, class, profession, etc. (Ybema et al. 2009), we find that an even greater number of people do not fit into either side of the dichotomy. In fact, very few male individuals, for example, fit into a category that presumed 'man' to refer to white, wealthy, heterosexual and with a professional qualification. In fact, this marginalises most of 'men' that have ever been, or are now currently alive. In this way, the essentialist view of the self marginalises most people, leaving only the elite that is socially perceived as the 'universal' self and hence dominant within social relations (e.g. Finucane et al. 2000).

The second key concern with the essentialist self is that it is static in many ways, including values held. In other words, once we know the essence of 'man' or 'woman', these traits are held as relevant regardless of time or context. Work on masculinity and femininity in the socialist feminist tradition has fundamentally challenged this notion (Connell 1995). Not only has it sought to separate 'man' or 'woman' from the traits associated with particular genders, but to demonstrate that these traits belong to all genders without losing the historical context in which the traits developed (Derry 1996). These traits, or masculine and feminine ideals, change over time in relation to each other, and therefore require an analysis of their social practice *in relation* to other practices and social change, *over time* (Schippers 2007). Prügl (2012, p. 32) for example, describes

> the myth of the financially prudent woman […] which proliferates an abundance of meanings fed by the notion of woman's Otherness, a new ground of contestation for these women over a truth of their own against the projections on them of man's dreams of moderation, fears of excesses and idols of profit.

Men as 'risk-takers' is a recent phenomenon that only works in relation to women as 'prudential'. Thus the simple social dichotomy, 'man' or 'woman', is in fact the production of changing social relations and their historical context, rather than any objective identification of core biological characteristics specific to a sex. Feminist theories thus propose an alternative to the essentialist self, called the relational self.

A Way Forward: The Transdisciplinary Alternative of the Relational Self

The concept of a relational self builds upon the idea that each self is composed of multiple, intersecting selves, that while different and sometimes in conflict, do not privilege one over another, and are constantly shaped and challenged through social relations and personal introspection within relevant contexts. This section discusses these three overlapping ideas in further detail.

Intersectionality and Multiple Identities

First, intersectionality depicts the self at the intersection of several identities, and not a fixed essence based on a particular biological form (Crenshaw 1989). Rather, the self is composed of multiple, heterogeneous 'others' which combine to create a self whose meaning is in relation to the other, framed within contextual hierarchies (Namaste 1994). So instead of the 'man' or 'woman' dichotomy, intersectionality suggests that there are multiple identities such as academic, women, mother, eco-warrior, friend, partner, social activist, etc. that interweave into a whole, dynamic self[6] that shifts and is shaped in relation to other relational selves (McCall 2005). Intersectionality thus dismantles the assumption that all women or men are the same (Nash 2008), but rather the self is composed of a unique combination of multiple identities interrelating through social structures and that characterise how an individual experiences her/his life.

Different, Not Better

Second, a relational self rejects the assumption that dichotomies presume opposites, and that opposites allow us to give a higher value to one side or the other (Butler 2004). A relational self, with multiple intersecting identities does not presume any one characteristic as more or less valuable, but as different and therefore *more or less prevalent* in different contexts. Nelson's (1992) work highlights the disproportionate value given to opposites on the gender dichotomy in the context of Western thinking, and the social relations that create and maintain it. She first argues that masculine traits are far more often viewed as positive and feminine traits as negative. She then invites us to reflect on the positive/negative counterparts of characteristics so as to neutralise the higher/lower, better/worse types of value associated with the trait. In this way, she demonstrates that gender images are ideals based on people's imagination, collective and cultural norms, and so is the value proscribed to them. As such, they can be reconstituted as differences, rather than opposites on a dichotomy and are merged to form a heterogeneous self not ascribed to fixed, perceived attributes that privilege one identity over another. The relational self therefore recognises a unique, multi-dimensional, introspective and relational self, where the heterogeneous whole sits at the crossroads of multiple social groups.

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[6] This is not to say that the whole self is harmonious. Rather, each identity contributes in unique ways to the heterogeneity of the self and these sometimes conflicting selves reflect the individual's lived experience.

Shaped by Changing Social Relations

Third, a relational self is a self that is shaped in interaction with other relational selves, and both shapes, and is shaped by, dynamic social structures (e.g. Borgerson 2007) that change over time and space (e.g. Charles 2012). In other words, to understand the self, we look at the perceived attributes of others and, through introspection, form our personal identity in relation to the identities of other groups. In the latest wave of transnational feminism, the perception of social identities is context-based and founded on globalised ideals of femininity and masculinity (e.g. Pearson 2007), as well as ideals of other social groups such as race, ethnicity, occupation, nationality, etc. (e.g. Charles 2012), that constantly evolve in relation to one another. As such, defining the self is as much about the unique composition of selves that form the whole, as it is about the way each self defines itself relative to other social groups.

Overall therefore, the feminist contribution to the understanding of the self departs from a dualistic view based on opposites of 'man' or 'woman'. Instead, it recognises and embraces all the multiple identities that make up a unique and heterogeneous self. *In this way, the self and other are combined into a relational self* through introspection and social interaction. It is this combination of self and other that provides us with an opportunity to meaningfully relate and engage with the parts of ourselves, and others, who are marginalised within mainstream thinking and social structures.

It is with this detailed insight into the problems with the essentialist self, and the possibilities created by the relational self, that we demonstrate the essentialist self underpinning the stakeholder concept, and therefore as yet undetected structures of marginalisation.

Underlying Assumptions in the Stakeholder Concept

To identify the underlying assumptions of the stakeholder concept, we utilise an analytical approach from within feminist traditions to deconstruct and 'surface' underpinning assumptions (e.g. Young 2011) of the stakeholder concept. Our deconstruction identifies that the stakeholder concept is underpinned by a notion of self that is 'essentialist', one key factor contributing to the continued marginalisation of groups with reduced access to power resources.

Stakeholder as Other

'Stakeholder theory is a theory of organisational management and ethics' (Phillips et al. 2003, p. 480). It is fundamentally relational in nature because it 'attempt[s] to articulate the meaning of the corporation and the sense of responsibility that businesses feel to those both inside and outside the 'walls' of the firms' (Wicks et al. 1994, p. 477).

Given that our interest is in how the self is conceptualised within the literature, it is striking to note that most definitions of 'stakeholder' imply that stakeholders are something different and separate to organisations—they are 'other'. For instance in one of the earliest definitions of stakeholder, the Stanford Research Institute defined them as 'groups without whose support the organisation would cease to exist' (Freeman et al. 2010, p. 207). Friedman and Miles similarly depict stakeholder theory as based on 'the dynamics of the organisation/stakeholder relation' (2002, p. 2). Mainardes et al. (2011) demonstrate this divide between organisations and 'their' stakeholders most clearly in their synthesis of Clarkson's paper. They state that 'according to Clarkson (1995), the stakeholder concept contains three fundamental factors: one, the organisation; two, *the other actors*; and three, the nature of the company-actor relationships' (2011, p. 228 emphasis added). The presumption of these definitions is that managers represent the organisation, and other stakeholders are different to that of the organisation.

The conflation of managers and the organisation is common throughout the literature. For instance, the Clarkson Centre for Business Ethics makes it very clear that 'managers should *acknowledge* and actively *monitor* the concerns of all legitimate stakeholders, and should take their interests appropriately into account in decision-making and operations' (emphasis in original) (1999, p. 4). The taken for granted nature of this assumption is still found in recent literature. Bundy et al. (2013) for instance view managers as those that determine salience of stakeholder claims based on their perception of the links between the issue, organisational identity and the strategic frame of the firm. This is crucial, because it implicitly suggests that not only are stakeholders different from each other, but that manager/organisation is different from stakeholders as a whole.

This leads to managers who are to 'consider' interests and 'balance' conflicts between stakeholders (e.g. Frederick et al. 1992), and thus further deepen the 'othering' of stakeholders. For instance, Freeman argues that 'the job of management is to keep stakeholder interests "in balance"' (Freeman et al. 2010, p. 214). While he stresses that this does not mean equal treatment, the point to note is that it is managers who consider and balance interests, not stakeholders themselves. Reynolds, Schultz and Hekman similarly argue that 'one of stakeholder theory's central tenets … is that managers are actively engaged in balancing the interests of their relevant stakeholders' (2006, p. 292). In fact, the ubiquitousness of this assumption has resulted in it being taken for granted. Rather than discussing whether managers *should* balance stakeholder interests, the question for Ogden and Watson (1999, p. 527) became the extent to which it is possible to '[maintain] an *appropriate balance*

between different stakeholder interests' (emphasis added). Stakeholders then, depend on managers to hear them in the first place, and then to interpret their engagement in light of, and in connection with, other groups.

In addition, managers are increasingly depicted as playing an important role in ensuring positive social change through the brokering of stakeholder relationships. Bridoux and Stoelhorst for instance suggest that organisations contribute to social welfare by fostering cooperative stakeholder relationships, which they are able to achieve because 'managers shape how individual stakeholders relate to the firm and to each other' (2016, p. 232). Mitchell et al. (2016) characterise the role of managers as intermediaries of broad stakeholder groups. Thus in addition to managers deciding between stakeholders, they are also often depicted as neutral parties mediating tradeoffs between these groups. In such cases, managers and the organisation are conflated into one entity, obfuscating key power dynamics, and essentializing *both* managers and stakeholders.

Stakeholder as Essentialist Other

This essentialisation of *all* stakeholders is common from quite early on in the formulation of stakeholder theory—stakeholders are often perceived as having 'typical' interests. For instance, Pearce states that:

> [i]n general, stockholders claim appropriate returns on their investments; employees seek broadly defined job satisfaction; customers want what they pay for; suppliers seek dependable buyers; governments want to adherence to legislated regulations; unions seek benefits for members in proportion to their contributions to company success; competitors want fair competition; local communities want companies that are responsible "citizens"; and the general public seeks some assurance that the quality of life will be improved as a result of the firm's existence (1982, p. 22).

Looking at more recent literature, it is clear that for many, the typical interests ascribed to stakeholders have changed little over time (see for instance Madsen and Bingham 2014), and that in fact, interests may not be a key driver of action (Rowley and Moldoveanu 2003).

This tendency towards seeing stakeholders as having typical interests that are relevant to the specific group, and the relatively unchallenged assumption that it is valid and legitimate to consider stakeholders in this way, represents their treatment as essentialist subjects (Butler 1990). While some contributions do discuss the fact that certain stakeholders are themselves heterogeneous *within-group* (e.g. Hart and Sharma 2004; Bridoux and Stoelhorst 2014; Greenwood and Anderson 2009), the vast majority of work 'probably implicitly, assume[s] homogeneity of interests

and priorities within role-based stakeholder groups' (Wolfe and Putler 2002, p. 66). Each stakeholder category (e.g. customer) is largely depicted as having a stable, fixed identity (e.g. focused on product quality and customer service), determined according to the perspective of the organisation (Friedman and Miles 2002). As a result, stakeholder interests are fixed to the relevant group and treated as relatively homogenous.

Essentialising groups in this way has the tendency to marginalise the experience and interests of much of the group in question (Hekman 2000), resulting in any other interests from this group not being heard. For instance, it is reasonable to suggest that people who are not customers of an organisation may be concerned about product quality. The outcry associated with the levels of pesticides in Coke in Kerala, India was not just from those who did or could presumably be exposed to this product, but from the international community, most of whom would have no risk of drinking the faulty product (see for instance Economist 2005). This is but one example demonstrating that stakeholders have many and varied interests, and that these likely span different social groups.

One of the few works to recognise and discuss heterogeneity of stakeholder interests was Freeman in his original discussion of the stakeholder role set. He indicated 'an employee may be a customer for XYZ's products, many belong to a Union of XYZ, may be an owner of XYZ, may be a member of Political Party #1 and may even be a member of a consumer advocate group. Many members of certain stakeholder groups are also members of other stakeholder groups…' (1984, p. 58). He then goes on to argue that these will cause conflicts and differing expectations for the organisation, which managers must then balance. Importantly, he highlights that this membership in more than one group at the same time is likely to cause '[c]onflict within each person and among group members' (Freeman 1984, p. 58). This conflict can surely be interpreted as individuals with varied interests who bring all their interests to bear on membership within each specific stakeholder group. Kassinis and Vafeas (2006) go further to investigate different aspects of within-group heterogeneity of two stakeholders—community and regulatory. They found constituents of communities that were wealthier, had ties to pro-environmental organisations and were more densely populated, were associated with significantly lower toxic emissions levels from local plants. Different constituents of the same stakeholder group therefore, were more influential on organisational activity than others—providing empirical evidence and support to Freeman's assertion, that 'most human beings are pretty complex' (Freeman et al. 2010, p. 7), rather than having homogenous interests.

Thus, the research implies that social intersections across stakeholder groups impact on decisional outcomes.

But what it fails to address is the intersectionality *within* a 'single' stakeholder group (community), and how these intersections (black and impoverished or white and historically wealthy) influence their experience of waste facilities and the structures that impose resulting pollutants on them. Certainly research into intersectionality would suggest that middle-class, white women experience life and have many different interests to black, working-class women (Yuval-Davis 2006). Useful depictions of stakeholders need to better incorporate this complexity, to let the more marginalised within a stakeholder group be identified more consistently.

In addition to this work are a few who question 'role-based' identification of stakeholders (e.g. McVea and Freeman 2005), and the view of the self used within management. For instance, Crane and Ruebottom maintain that 'economic roles and social identities cannot stand independently, but must be analysed simultaneously' (2011, p. 78). Their way forward is an interesting step towards recognition of not only the power associated with economic identification of valid stakeholders, but the heterogeneity that exists within traditional stakeholder groups. Recognition of 'other' is the first step in removing the distance between self and other.

As we saw earlier, Freeman and Auster (2011) begin to challenge the concept of the essentialist values in leadership, and instead suggest a more connected self that should be

> joining together and engaging in joint understanding and introspection, connection and creating joint aspirations given their histories. This process of ongoing dialogue and conversation about who we are, what we stand for, where we came from and how we want to 'live' in the organisation nurtures the conditions in which authenticity is likely to emerge (Auster and Freeman 2013, p. 41).

We are thus encouraged to see 'others' for who they are, where they have come from and their future aspirations.

In so doing, these contributions strongly recognise the existence of 'other', and a desire to understand and collaborate with them. They demonstrate the need for an enriched depiction of the stakeholder concept, that takes into account *both* the self and other, and who operates outside the walls of the corporation. Our finding that the stakeholder concept is underpinned by the essentialist self provides both a reason for the concern with self that has bubbled up within the literature, and an important change needed to begin addressing marginalisation—a stakeholder concept enriched by an explicit use of a relational self, where *multiple dynamic selves* are recognised as comprising the whole self, and *selves held in common with others* are found outside *and inside* the organisation.

Therefore, in the final section, we begin to enrich the stakeholder concept to explicitly account for multiple heterogeneous selves. To do so, we first define 'stakeholder' in a way that is consistent with the relational self. We then briefly consider how an enriched stakeholder concept might be brought into practice by considering stakeholder identification processes.

Enriching the Stakeholder with a Relational Self

Reconciling the self and other is about recognising the importance of others' perceptions in defining a dynamic, multi-dimensional and relational self. To make the notion of a relational stakeholder self feasible, it first needs to be recognised at the individual level, and second, social groups need to be based on a sense of belonging (through experience) to organisational activity.[7]

An Enriched Stakeholder

The first component in enriching stakeholders with relational selves, and improving the ability to be heard, is for individuals to investigate the multiple identities that make up their own relational self, i.e. to be introspective about their own experiences. Using tools such as Nelson's (1992) thought experiment, individuals can become aware of each different identity, and see that each identity is different, not better or worse. In so doing, an individual can see the multiple identities that make up her/his whole relational self at the current time, and begin to recognise others who share these identities, and thus identify the selves that are held in common with particular others. In this way, individuals can begin to recognise themselves in others and others in themselves, and to treat them as such within organisational processes.

So for instance, treating someone as a customer because they purchase a product does not recognise the multi-dimensionality of who that person is, and how those selves interrelate with the selves of others to create that person's response to a particular organisation or product. If I, for example, purchase 2 l of milk from a national supermarket chain, it may not be that my primary concern is whether it is pasteurised and thus 'safe' to drink, but the health benefits of the calcium for my children, the welfare of the animals who produced the milk or the impact of milk production on the environment. My participation in other groups interested in animal welfare, childhood nutrition or the impact of intensive farming on the environment might equally be

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[7] To help ease the flow of argument, from this point on, when we refer to an identity group such as manager, we will presume it to be a heterogeneous group, but will refer to it only as 'manager'. We will presume that the individual who has such an identity is associated with the part of the heterogeneous group for which they feel the most affinity.

substantive influences in how I feel about and make the purchase. It may in future mean that I decide not to purchase milk from that supermarket chain, or simply stop purchasing milk altogether, or switch to soya milk. This will have little to do with the specific store from which I purchase my milk or the brand of the milk—and therefore am designated 'customer'—and more with the group-identities in which I exist. Thus as a relational self, the classification of customer is a very small part of the relationship I have with the organisation and does little to recognise the other influences to which I am subject and contribute.

Crucially, applying this to the identities within the group 'manager' means that so long as they can be meaningfully expressed, the 'other' already exists within organisational processes through our multiple selves. Being a manager of an organisation would be but one of the selves shaping itself in interaction with 'others'. This self that includes a manager identity might also equally include woman and animal rights activist and mother. If the organisation for which s/he works is a large scale milk producer, it may very well be that selves are in conflict, but the point is that s/he has selves in common with people interacting within and outside the walls of the organisation. Thus, with introspection, s/he can better understand and engage those who share a sense of belonging to important issues such as the health impacts of milk on children or animal welfare concerns. For instance, our manager/woman/mother/protestor already brings her whole self to decisions that she makes at work. While it may be the case that she tries to, or is successful in, devaluing or censoring her other identities, reframing the stakeholder concept as being based on a heterogeneous, relational self gives her a legitimate justification for bringing her whole self into the workplace, and being heard as such. It also allows her to bring forth common concerns, issues and opportunities from the common selves she shares with those inside and outside the walls of the organisation, providing more meaningful engagement between those groups impacted by organisational activities. By recognising and speaking out with all her selves, and by viewing them as different, rather than as better or worse, she is combining the self and other in such a way that provides the foundation for reducing marginalisation of different identities.

The second component we need to consider so as to enrich the stakeholder concept is the *interaction* of relational selves and the creation of social identity groups.

An Enriched Stakeholder and Group Belonging

As we have seen above, the relational self intersects with multiple relational selves, and thus comes to shape itself over time. Thus, interests, objectives and responsibilities intersect within and across different identity groups (including stakeholder identities), and across space and time, resulting in

social groups that are both the medium and outcome of these interactions. However, the extent to which these identity groups come to be meaningful for a relational self depends to some extent on shared experiences which create, willingly or unwillingly, a sense of belonging.

Young (2011) discusses how shared experiences, whether positive or negative, shape those that identify or are identified with a particular social group. She argues that we feel a stronger sense of belonging with people who share common experiences, and often these common experiences result in the creation of a common social self. Basing her view of social groups on a notion of the relational self, Young suggests that social groups are comprised of '[m]embers [who] have a specific affinity with one another because of their similar experience or way of life, which prompts them to associate with one another more than with those not identified with the group, or in a different way' (2011, p. 43). Sharing similar experiences at least once means the experience will be part of group members' selves tomorrow, even though they may never share another experience. Multiple shared experiences strengthen or weaken, through introspection, the sense of belonging to particular identity groups. Individual identities and group ideals shape, challenge and/ or reproduce each other over time (Charles 2012). Sharing experiences, shaping and reshaping of responses to these experiences, are key interdependent parts of a whole self that creates a sense of belonging in organisational practices, especially given that an organisation is itself a social location where the self is "constructed along multiple axes of difference" (Yulas-Davis 2006).

Therefore, stakeholders as constituted by economic transactions with organisations (Crane and Ruebottom 2011) would only constitute social identity groups if they experienced and recognised a common relational self, not simply because they bought a product or sold a widget to the organisation. While at certain points in history it has been true that individuals can sometimes coalesce around the category given to them by others, such as the consumer boycott of Nestle (Klein et al. 2004), this is certainly not always the case. I may share a sense of belonging with those from a predetermined stakeholder category (such as customer) but equally I may not, given my experiences in that domain and other domains, and thus struggle to relate and/ or engage others in speaking out and/or being heard on organisational issues that impact me. Thus, stakeholder categories such as customer, supplier and manager, are relevant to the extent to which they are underpinned by social groups with some shared sense of experience and belonging with organisational activities.

With regard to the environment as a stakeholder, it must be represented within organisations through a human voice, such as in the form of passionate campaigners, or scientists presenting research. Similar to humans, the environment

and its constituent living beings can be perceived as having particular experiences (e.g. pollutants released into a stream, loss of habitat, genetically modified crops, animal welfare, etc.) that are shared by members of that ecosystem, and to which those members shape themselves and their communities. It is through a human voice that this ecological 'self' can be represented within the human world, and where shared experiences related to those impacts can be articulated.

Therefore, enriching the stakeholder concept with the reality of multiple common selves is one route by which the idea of stakeholder theory can be refined to improve the practical consequences of those most marginalised, and yet directly impacted in organisational activity.

Enriching the Definition of 'stakeholder'

To enrich the stakeholder concept, we take inspiration from Freeman and Auster's (2011) interconnected self, combined with the importance of a sense of belonging (e.g. Charles 2012), and Young's (2011) definition of social groups:

> Stakeholders are groups of relational selves who have experienced organisational processes, inputs and/ or outputs at one or more points in time, and whose experience can be legitimated through the common living selves within & outside the organisation.

This shift is important because it moves away from identifying stakeholders as a party to a transaction, based on static role-based interests, to focusing on groups with shared experiences of organisational activity that sometimes results in the creation and/ or identification of a common self.

Adopting an enriched 'stakeholder' concept means that one constant point of intersection between stakeholders is the organisation itself. Thus it may be the case that some social identities are maintained only in relation to organisational processes. For instance, some NGO identities are created in relation to organisations who are believed to be harming social or natural systems, such as Greenpeace. In effect, the experience of existing in the same social space as the organisation creates a natural incentive for stakeholders to engage with the organisation *based on how it impacts on their shared experience and way of life*. As such the role of manager is not to *be* the organisation, but, through introspection, to *let* all his/her other selves speak on the impact the organisation has on their current and future selves.

Interestingly, there are some examples of organisations recognising stakeholder heterogeneity in the workplace. PricewaterhouseCoopers for instance has created the Gay, Lesbian and Everyone Else (GLEE) community to support and recognise the achievements of its members. Members of the community are given space and opportunity to meet, with the objective of improving the visibility and reducing the stigma associated with members of the LGBTQ+ community (Reid-Smith 2012). Thus, they are treated by the organisation as a social group of members representing different sexual orientations, not as a homogenous group of employees.

Stakeholders would thus develop their own identities and engage in shared experiences, while also developing in relation to, and in some cases with, the 'other' (Borgerson 2007), bringing the self and other closer together and at the same time extending them within and outside the walls of the organisation.

In our concluding section, we attempt to provide some imperfect suggestions for how an enriched stakeholder concept might usefully be incorporated into the challenging area of stakeholder identification.

Identifying Stakeholders and Limits to Participation

Identifying stakeholder groups, marginalised groups in particular, remains challenging given the inherent power relations of previous approaches (Parent and Deephouse 2007). Most of the stakeholder identification literature presumes a very active role for managers, such as in the balancing of competing interests as discussed earlier. Even contributions concerned with underlying power structures continue to view it is legitimate and appropriate for managers to be active and in control of the selection of relevant stakeholder groups (Hart and Sharma 2004). Dawkins (2014) for instance, concerned about the underlying power relations that guide stakeholder engagement, does not question the very active role played by managers in identifying stakeholders in the first place.

It is the active and controlling role played by managers that we suggest is problematic, as it reinforces power asymmetries and assumptions of the essentialist self, where the manager is best placed to identify and determine relevance of a stakeholder group.

We therefore suggest the need for organisations to be *much more passive* in identifying stakeholders, and instead to be active in creating support structures for stakeholder self-identification. This more passive role implies increased responsibility in the hands of enriched stakeholders (e.g. business, the NGO community, international institutions), government in particular, to collaborate in helping groups speak out and be heard. Where some stakeholders are already well defined in the sense that there is an established community in which dialogue takes place between members, such as the LGBTQ+ community, it is relatively straight forward for some or all members to determine whether they are being impacted by an issue and thus choose to speak out. For other groups who are less well defined or struggle for opportunities to interact, Young (2011, p. 184) suggests three mechanisms for improving the ability of oppressed

groups in particular, to find and express their voice(s). The first is government resources provided for the purpose of self-organisation to 'achieve collective empowerment and a reflective understanding of their collective experience and interests in the context of society'. Second is for these groups to analyse and create policy proposals from their perspective(s) to use in engagement activities. Third is for these groups to have veto power over 'specific policies that affect a group directly' (p. 184). In so doing, opportunities are created for stakeholders to meet and share experiences, and determine how, if at all, members wish to represent themselves on organisational (or other) issues.

This could take the form of physical or virtual spaces, where organisations are required to provide funds to local government for individuals to find their common selves and work to define their voices, so as to speak out. For instance, Truman Development Corporation, based in Calgary, Canada, provides an interesting and early example of this type of engagement. As a property developer in the region, it has faced an increasingly complex community approvals process before being awarded government approvals. As such, they decided to open the "Engage Hub", a building dedicated to providing community members with the ability to come to see detailed plans on activity, and to engage in the process over many weeks leading up to council approval (White 2014). Providing space for community members to come and engage has proven very popular and effective in ensuring local community support of final plans. It has worked so well that other developers are now creating their own hubs. Although the focus is not to help marginalised stakeholders specifically, it provides a space for community members with common selves to identify each other and to determine how best to speak out and be heard.

While we recognise this is not a panacea, we believe the creation of physical and virtual spaces is a practical step forward that more powerful stakeholders, working together, can do to further recognise and mitigate stakeholder marginalisation. Thus, physical and virtual spaces of this kind may give marginalised people yet more opportunity to be heard.

Concluding Thoughts and Implications

Stakeholder theory has an important and significant impact on management theory and practice. For many, the practical consequences are positive, but for those with few power resources, this is not the case. This concern with the continued marginalisation of these stakeholders has steadily grown within the literature (e.g. Blowfield 2005b; Banerjee 2008; Jensen and Sandstrom 2011), suggesting the need for a refinement of stakeholder theory.

Similar to those who demonstrate important overlaps between the stakeholder concept and feminist thinking (e.g.

Derry 1996; Borgerson 2007; Grosser and Moon 2017), we see the power of feminist analysis and its transdisciplinary intellectual background in highlighting and making explicit structures that reproduce and extend marginalisation. Our contribution to this growing dialogue on stakeholder marginalisation is to suggest that the separation of the self/other within the stakeholder concept is likely to be responsible, in part, for practical consequences of marginalisation felt by the least powerful. By revealing the separation of self and other present within the stakeholder concept, we show how the stakeholder is presumed to be an essentialist other, and thus devalued. Through suggesting an enriched stakeholder concept, and some steps toward a more passive and introspective process for identifying stakeholders, we add another part of the puzzle in mitigating stakeholder marginalisation through the relational self.

From the perspective of academia, taking these contributions seriously will require reflection of the (often) taken-for-granted assumptions about who stakeholders are and why they act in particular ways. It will mean necessarily digging into the complexity of interconnections between stakeholders and recognising the limits we place on our knowledge of stakeholder relationships through the use of narrow categories in our thinking and research. It will also require a much more nuanced approach to dealing with organisational activity and those who are involved in maintaining and challenging this activity. In particular, it will require continued challenge to what counts as the legitimate boundaries of an organisation and how they are constructed.

From the perspective of practice, taking these contributions seriously will require a fundamental renegotiation of the role played by individuals within organisations and the ability to recognise marginalised selves within the self and the organisation. This work will begin the process of creating space for marginalised stakeholders outside the organisation to be recognised and brought closer to the organisation. No longer will it be acceptable to be 'the manager' or to 'put on your manager hat', but to think more broadly about the interests affected by the decisions and activities under consideration, and most importantly, to hear 'others' inside and outside the boundaries of the individual and of the organisation. As individuals, we would be challenged to bring more of ourselves to work and to speak out with all of these selves, including those that disagree with organisational thinking and activity. It would mean the need to learn more tolerance for heterogeneous opinions, reduce conflict-based and hierarchical forms of power used within organisational structures, and to slow down decision making to allow selves from inside and outside the organisation to engage.

Much additional research is needed in this area, and the next steps may fruitfully follow two paths. The first is to continue deconstructing core concepts within stakeholder theory to make explicit other structures of marginalisation

that are likely to exist. For instance, in making our argument, we mention but do not account for the complex set of structures that underlie the provision of aid in the context of providing space for marginalised people to meet and share experiences. A second path might be to focus on the lived experience of enriched stakeholders, and to look for practical methods by which multiple identities can come to the fore within organisations. For instance, in early stages of recognising relational selves, how might organisations create safe places for internal stakeholders to explicitly speak out and be heard in decision making processes?

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

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