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Finding Viola: the untrue, true story of a groundbreaking female African Nova Scotian entrepreneur

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ABSTRACT
Viola Desmond is now considered a forerunner in the civil rights movement in Canada. Lesser known is her role as a groundbreaking and successful African Nova Scotian entrepreneur. In this paper, the author pursues two objectives: (1) elevate the entrepreneurial accomplishments and lessons of Viola Desmond, and (2) explore a unique feminist approach to critical historiography, which fuses prowoman polemical writing, with fictocritical strategies and autoethnography. The research question guiding this study is: How can the application of a novel feminist approach help reveal an overlooked historical female figure who has been marginalized by a web of interlocking discourses? The paper makes three related contributions: (1) achieving recognition for Viola Desmond as an overlooked contributor to our understanding of female leadership in black entrepreneur; (2) promoting an understanding of her lost lessons and accomplishments; and (3) providing a plausible explanation for why Viola Desmond was omitted from the conceptualization of the field.

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Personal Reflection

When I met Viola Desmond for the first time, she had been dead for 48 years. I saw her portrait at a holiday reception in 2014 at Government House, the home of British Crown's representative, the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, Canada. Viola's profile was regal and dignified. In this latent colonialist milieu, with staunch English traditions, she stood out not only as a woman, but as a woman of colour in a sea of portraits of white men. Who was she? What was her story? The portrait was beautiful and painted by local Pictou County artist, David MacIntosh. Tragically, she was so very young when she died; only 50 years old. I had to know who she was! I would soon learn that she had become famous in recent years. Well … famous again.

Introduction

Over the course of the last 10 years, Viola Desmond has become recognized in Canada as a brave civil rights leader. However, her role as a business leader has been neglected. Through the 1930s and 1940s, Viola Desmond was a groundbreaking, African Nova Scotian[1] female entrepreneur, operating in a time of segregation. Granted, there are several forerunners who have been overlooked in the

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development of management and organizational studies and perhaps not surprisingly, women and women of colour are especially marginalized (e.g. see Williams and Mills 2017, 2018). However, Viola stands out as not only an impressive entrepreneur, but as an inspirational historical black female leader[2] who navigated both gender and racial barriers to find incredible success.

In this paper, I pursue two objectives. First, I want to surface the overlooked entrepreneurial accomplishments and lessons of Viola Desmond. Second, I wish to explore the potential of a feminist approach to critical historiography, which fuses prowoman polemical writing, with fictocritical strategies and autoethnography. The research question guiding this study is: How can the application of a novel feminist approach help reveal an overlooked historical female figure who has been marginalized by a web of interlocking discourses?

I endeavour in this paper to make three related contributions to management and organizational studies and management history: (1) achieve recognition for Viola Desmond as an unheeded contributor to our understanding of female leadership in black entrepreneurship; (2) promote an understanding of her lost lessons and accomplishments; and (3) provide a plausible explanation for why Viola Desmond was omitted from the conceptualization of the field. My interests include critiquing the role of history in neglecting significant figures, as well as surfacing what such disregard creates, namely a highly limited, gendered and exclusionary understanding of the past. In this paper, I also hope to illustrate an important connection to praxis and social change through activist, academic writing.

Who was Viola Desmond?

As remarkable as Viola Desmond was, most Canadians know very little about her, beyond recent efforts to recognize her as a civil rights leader who challenged racial segregation in the rural town of New Glasgow, in the east coast province of Nova Scotia, Canada. In 1946, she bravely refused to give up her seat in a 'whites-only' section of a movie theatre (Reynolds and Robson 2018). She was arrested and convicted:

> Given these similarities in history [between Canada and the United States], especially in relation to the practice of Jim Crow-style[3] segregation and the struggle for racial equality in both countries, it is perhaps fitting for us to designate a figure like Viola Desmond as Canada's Rosa Parks […] Both these courageous Black women were catalysts in the larger collective struggle for civil rights and social justice (Reynolds, Clarke, and Robson 2016, 175).

The refrain of 'Canada's Rosa Parks' is something I will return to later in this paper, but for context here, it is important to note the similarities. Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in the 'coloured section' of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Rosa went on to become a celebrated activist in the civil rights movement in the US. The United States Congress coined her as 'the first lady of civil rights' and the 'mother of the freedom movement' (Congressional Record 1999). Viola has followed a similar trajectory of recognition.

The story I want to tell you about Viola Desmond is a broader one. Surfacing Viola's entrepreneurial achievements is difficult as there has been considerable (and appropriate) focus on her fearless action in 1946. To understand Viola as a businesswoman and pioneering entrepreneur, we must begin earlier in the story of her life.

In the face of significant colour barriers, she fought hard to be educated in an emerging field, despite no formal training and mentorship being offered in Canada. Her business was the first of its kind in Canada. After establishing her beauty salon, she also expanded to include various product lines, mail-order sales, and a training school – three effective business verticals. She did all of this with 'an image of self-confidence, respectability and independence' (Reynolds and Robson 2018, p. x). Her accomplishments on their own are significant, but if we consider the intersectional barriers of gender, race and class, and remember that she faced considerable difficulties as an African Nova Scotian woman operating in a time of segregation and Jim Crow policy, what she did is simply unmatched and extraordinary.

For Viola, it was difficult to pursue the advantages of education, which gave some women more independence, but no release from the difficulties of juggling family responsibilities alongside of a career. Viola was a 'modern' woman, long before such concepts became popularized in the 1960s together with the formal civil rights movement in both Canada and the US.[4] She was an extraordinarily successful entrepreneur, business professional, community leader and mentor.

Viola's legacy includes her enterprises, which expanded beyond the Canadian Maritimes and lasted for nearly two decades. It also includes her many graduates who established professional businesses of their own in Halifax and other parts of Canada (Reynolds and Robson 2018). In context, we must also appreciate what her work did for other women in her community who were suffering the same intersectional barriers that were compounded by 'traditional post-war contours of life, which offered limited employment opportunities for women' (Reynolds and Robson 2018, 81).

Sadly, after the events of 1946 and the resulting trial and conviction, her marriage suffered, and her family became very concerned about the high profile nature of the court case (Reynolds and Robson 2018). Ultimately, Viola closed her businesses, moving first to Montreal and then to New York in 1955 to pursue other business interests. Viola died suddenly and tragically in 1965 in her New York apartment from a gastrointestinal hemorrhage (Canada's Walk of Fame 2017). Her family has reflected what might have come to be, had the events of 1946 not stalled her success, broke up her marriage and led to her leaving her home (Robson and Caplan 2010). I cannot help but wonder as well.

Viola was a remarkable person. She was a forerunner in business and built a new profession; innovating and expanding with new products and services. She was also an outstanding mentor and teacher to other aspiring businesswomen, helping them to follow in her path, find independence, enterprise and commerce. In addition to these great accomplishments, she was an inspiring civil rights advocate, leader and community builder. Few come close to her remarkable accomplishments in ideal circumstances, and she faced incredible obstacles.

Seeking permission: an invitation to allyship

My biggest hesitation in engaging Viola as a figure to study has been and continues to be, how much to say, and what to say about race. As a white Euro-Canadian woman, I feel it appropriate to reflect deeply on a number of questions: Am I the right person to tell her story? Does my voice displace another's? Will I get it right? Can I use my privilege to be an ally? Let me be clear, I do not want to speak for Viola, but I want her ideas to come to the surface and be recognized. She is a civil rights icon, and a brilliant business leader and entrepreneur.

I have needed and have gratefully received a lot of help in this work and it is important to acknowledge this. I am indebted to close friends, fellow scholars, community leaders, business leaders, peers, mentors, and blind reviewers. All have provided important inputs and I believe I have been steered in a particularly meaningful direction. In every interaction, I have felt encouraged to continue this work as a demonstration of how to be an advocate and ally against anti-black racism. However, as my reader, you should know that I feel a heavy responsibility in the telling of Viola's story.

Perhaps the most important support I have had is from Mrs. Wanda Robson, Viola's sister. Wanda will be 94 on December 16, 2020. Over the last three years, I have had the opportunity to talk with her and we have exchanged letters. In one of her letters, she kindly wrote in reference to my attention to Viola's entrepreneurial accomplishments: 'I learned so much and I guess one is never too old to learn' (Reynolds and Robson 2018). At an in-person meeting in February 2020, she directly and with calculated emphasis told me 'you-got-it-all-right' (W. Robson, Personal Communication, February 14, 2020). I will admit that this did provide me with comfort and confidence to continue. To be honest, I think she has been my moral guide; first through her writings and then in our conversations. As a feminist, engaged in critical historiography, I know that there is no such thing as *truth*, but I did hold in my heart a goal to 'get it right' according to Wanda. I see it as a way to honour the work that

she undertook in raising Viola's profile as a civil rights icon. Without Wanda, I would have never found Viola.

Writing is simultaneously bounded by constraints, while also offering possibilities. I am hoping that the way I will offer up Viola's story here will serve her, and not marginalize other voices from surfacing important insights and new knowledge. By no means do I wish to offer an anemic account of a magnificent person, but I do think that I am most qualified to speak only and directly to her role as an overlooked female figure of significance in management and organizational studies and management history. I have no doubt that this will not be the end of Viola's potential lessons for scholarship and practice.

Whiteness in management and organizational studies

My work as a feminist scholar and social welfare advocate has always had a dimension of advocacy with an aim of seeking social justice and social change. Specifically, my work in the non-profit sector has often been to 'stand up for', or to 'stand with'. However, before now, I have not had the opportunity to examine my own privilege and responsibility in scholarship as it relates to my whiteness. Through this research, I began to develop a deeper understanding of the roots of white privilege in scholarship, which exists not only in the selection of subjects and research interests, but also in authorship. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2006) as cited in Al Ariss et al. (2014) describes whiteness as 'an invisible norm against which other identities are measured and by which they are defined historically' (socially and legally) (363). Whereas Neely and Samura (2011) describe whiteness as contextual and relational, as well as intersectional and temporal, which reveals its durability over time and its complexity. The objective of management and organizational scholars interested in understanding whiteness in scholarship has been to approach from one of two intentions: (1) deconstructing privilege, or (2) tackling discrimination (Al Ariss et al. 2014). The orientation of this paper fits into the latter and is an exercise in grabbling directly with not only why Viola was neglected, but how?

Theoretical frame and methodological approach

I identify as a feminist polemicist. My work engages with the past through critical historiography. My approach to inquiry fuses fictocritical strategies with autoethnography and therefore I am present emotionally and materially in my work. In the following section, I describe this theoretical frame and approach in more detail.

Feminist polemics (theoretical frame)

As a feminist polemicist, I am interested in disrupting current and past patriarchal narratives with prowoman writing. Specifically, my research interests have focused on overlooked historical female figures who have been ignored by management and organizational studies and management history (Williams, 2017, 2018). By adopting this standpoint, I am also signally that I reject 'the traditionally silencing of women' in favour of articulating independent and 'self constituted' female agency (Ferguson 1986, 457). By doing so, I wish to undermine the existing and taken for granted view, highlighting its limitations and the resulting suppositions and claims. I therefore offer here a combination of activist writing and scholarship.

Though I was first introduced to polemics through the work of Joan Scott (2014), I subsequently found Moira Ferguson (1986) who conceptually defines three kinds of feminist polemics: (1) reactive, (2) reasoned and (3) personal. Here I draw on the third, which fuses elements of autoethnography with emotional reflections. These are sometimes referred to as 'polemics of the heart' (Ferguson 1986, 452). Ferguson further distinguishes the feminist polemicist as more than just a woman who writes against misogyny, but rather a woman who is also in 'opposition to physical and psychological enslavement of people of colour' (452). Writing thus becomes a provocation and rhetorical

strategy. I have used polemics to assert the importance of the lives and experiences of women. Ferguson refers to this objective as understanding the lives of women 'enough for posterity' and links it to the popular twentieth century feminist concept: the 'personal as political' (Ferguson 1986, 457; Hanisch [1996] 2006). I would take it further with the aim of social justice and social change, which can only be achieved with a *persuasive and powerful linguistic strategy*.

My interest in the power of language tracks with poststructural perspectives (see Scott 1988; 2004). I believe that language and meaning can be temporarily fixed and culturally and historically contingent, based on specific discourses organized by social power. I believe that language is ideological and produces and maintains political, economic and social conditions. Poststructuralism seeks to reveal the social, historical, cultural and institutional context of all phenomena to reveal how power operates (Weedon 1997). Weedon (1997) argues that meaning-making is relational. The concept of truth (present and past realities) is socially constructed. As such, historians select between different accounts of subjective realities, whereas critical historiographers reveal the more fragmented traces and contest the scientificity of historical practice (Weedon 1997; Rose 2010). In my approach, I attempt to destabilize so-called truths, by surfacing alternative voices, and challenging subjectivities in localized contexts (Collinson 2005).

My approach to writing tends to favour postmodern methods. I find Marcuse's (1960) postmodern ideas about emancipation from repressive social systems rather inspiring and helpful here:

> Break down the self-assurance and self-contentment of common sense, to undermine the sinister confidence in power and language of facts, to demonstrate that unfreedom is so much at the core of things that the development of their internal contradictions leads necessarily to qualitative change (ix).

In this way, I am acknowledging the power of writing to achieve social justice and change.

There is a critique of poststructuralism (and postmodernism) by some feminists, and this is worth noting in the context of this historical analysis, which for me, draws on both.[5] Hoff (1994) argues the limitations of both poststructuralism and postmodernism for the feminist historian. On one hand, she notes that poststructuralism can only go so far; dismantling the discourses at work, appreciating context, and identifying the role of power (Hoff 1994). Essentially, there is no generative opportunities and no individual agency. Whereas postmodernism eschews temporality and cannot be reconciled to the idea of history and seeks to depoliticize gender. This is an afront to the basic principles of feminism (Hoff 1994). Essentially, poststructuralism offers no growth and agency, but postmodernism offers no political clout (a necessary ingredient for advocacy) (Hoff 1994).

I contend that the only thing we have left is the idea that a potentially contentious, but plausible and persuasive rhetorical and linguistic strategy can (and should) inspire. If so, perhaps it can become as durable as the so-called truths we take for granted. I do not think that my work as a feminist is to slot women into an existing patriarchal (or racist) 'grand narrative'. I do think it is my purpose to offer 'an unapologetic gendered account and an epistemologically shaped challenge to the sociology of knowledge – the act of gendered knowledge making' (Williams and Mills 2018, 287).

Fictocriticism and autoethnography (methodological approach)

The practice of making a history is something that happens as a continuous process in the present. It draws not only on so-called facts, but for the critical historiographer, it also pays close attention to veracity of such facts, the myriad of contestations, the habits of collecting facts, the individuals who do the fact-collecting, and the decisions taken as to what is important and what is not. Those who curate the traces of the past to create a history (whether believing so or not) bring their own subjectivity and agenda to the process. I believe it is important to be reflexive in this process as I do bring my own agenda: to disrupt the current practices, to develop feminist knowledge and to tell feminine histories.

The challenge with developing feminine histories is that the sources are often incomplete and involve actors that have be oppressed due to politics, gender, race, class or the proclivities of the

chronicler. My approach is therefore, one which is intentional, attempts to understand contextual factors, and is openly gendered and discursive.

Scott (2008) argues that politics construct gender and the historical discourse has created a sustained normative male/female opposition. Feminist politics in the 1960s revealed the potential for women as a focus of historical investigation (Scott 2008; Rose 2010). This means that women have not just been historically neglected as subjects, but rather they have been overtly silenced and oppressed (Rose, 2010). 'Woman have been neglected as historical subjects because historians viewed history to be almost singularly about the exercise and transmission of power in the realms of politics and economics, arenas in which the actors were men' (Rose 2010, 4). Scott (2008) contends that accepted histories of women have kept women out of history. In the mid 1980s, it was Scott who further primed the field of feminist inquiry into the past and encouraged the adoption of a theoretical approach rather than just a descriptive one (Rose 2010).

Understanding Viola's story (through a combination of utterances and traces by various actors) also becomes a platform for a deeper discussion about the development of the field, the privileged players and their privileged stories. Her story highlights the rhetorical, political and ideological strategies which persist in the study of management and organizational studies and management history.

To thwart convention, while also maintaining an important dimension of reflexivity, I combine fictocriticism with autoethnography. Whereas autoethnography is currently enjoying strong favour amongst critical management scholars, fictocriticism has not been widely adopted (see Rhodes 2015; Weatherall 2018). Informed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (see Sørensen 2005) 'fictocriticism is self-reflexive writing that breaks down the boundaries between fiction and criticism, reader and writer, by using aesthetic techniques' (Jiwa 2013, 104). To understand the potential of fictocriticism is to understand the challenges and divisions which exist between creating a narrative (such as an essay or history or fiction) and theory and criticism. Imagine a meshing of these outputs to create a single account, which is emotional, compelling and persuasive (instead of just inert traces). Fictocriticism is a way to 'write and think [of] an embodied, textuated past or as individual intrusions into particular debates' (Schlunke and Brewster 2005, 393). It is the opportunity to visit the site of a complex history provocatively and bring together numerous voices to work in unison or in counterpoint (Gibbs 2003).

Defining fictocriticism is difficult, as it is often defined in terms of what it is not: 'when we begin to define or declare what fictocriticism is or is not, fictocriticism loses its purpose, which is first and foremost a space of possibility' (Schlunke and Brewster 2005). Fictocritical approaches are well established in creative writing, literary studies and cultural studies. Fictocriticism was established in the 1990s as a feminist postmodern approach capable of challenging established conventions of academically acceptable writing (Hancox and Muller 2011). It is a feminist call meant to inspire alignment between politics and personal practice – namely how we think and how we write (Linden 2012). It is also meant to be an expression of the feminine and a confrontation to representations of the masculine, which hold back women's achievements and progress (Linden 2012).

Feminist practice has long promoted a passionate intertextuality to develop an understanding of women and their writings (Gibbs 2003). Such practices also hold value in writing *for* women, affording agency (through enunciation[6]), and to help make them feel alive and embodied; capable of being remembered, admired and even, loved. One of the gifts of fictocriticism is that it intervenes on the research process, challenging the researcher and writer to *not* become dispassionate and distanced (Gibbs 2003). The conventions of traditional academic writing and the promise of an objective recanting are exchanged with powerful, even emotional writing (Gibbs 2003). In practice, my approach to fictocriticism is marked by first-person, emotion-filled writing, punctuated with passionate autoethnographic reflections, literary quotes, and the combination of creative narrative with academic strategies. Where traces fail to reveal, I fill in these gaps with my own ideas to provide a fuller and more persuasive story. I believe that for 'facts to become memorable, an element of fiction [is] essential' (Eksteins, as cited in Gray 2013).

I am in familiar territory for many feminists but let me share the roots of these ideas in management and organizational studies. It was Calás and Smircich (1991) who first said: 'Perhaps by having been outside the dominant academic order, some women's writing and thinking has been more adventurous, as they didn't have to conform to the modern tradition of knowledge' (397). Writing differently, is perhaps a *sweet spot* for feminists because this form of 'writing ourselves into the organizational text has provided us with the pleasures of resistance and activism' (Calás and Smircich 1991, 598).

Among critical historiographers and historians, the concept of fiction is understandably controversial. Munslow (2010) and others have struggled with the idea that history is a mixture of fact and narrative and that advancing fiction in service to facts breaks with an implicit pact between the consumers of history and the historian. Thus, the work of history as factual, and fiction as narrative, work in opposition; they are seen as incommensurable approaches. But what if they were not? I prefer to see history as a messing accounting of fact, traces, expression, meaning making and philosophy and I do not think we have adequately theorized the value of fiction to history. I would contend that instead of operating in opposition, they are often one in the same. Afterall, 'experience is unknowable outside of language and thus it is itself discursively produced' (Rose 2010, 13).

Ranft (2013) and others have investigated black female identities and histories of oppression through fictional literary productions. Renowned Canadian historical fiction writer, Margaret Atwood (1996) suggests that where there are holes in accounts, writers need to be given permission take liberty:

> I have of course fictionalized historical events (as did many commentators on this case who claimed to be writing history). I have not changed any known facts, although the written accounts are so contradictory that few facts emerge as unequivocally 'known' […] When in doubt, I have tried to choose the most likely possibility, while accommodating all possibilities wherever feasible. Where mere hints and outright gaps exist in the records, I have felt free to invent (as cited in Alias Grace, 564).

My view is that fiction can be no less factual, no less relevant in its power to provoke emotion, and in its power to create a persuasive sense of time, place and people.

> What then are the possibilities for writing in and from the academy in a manner that might somehow allow the heart's instincts to be followed and the vast possibilities of expression to be explored and enjoyed? (Rhodes 2015).

If the facts are unclear or even contradictory and when the holes in the stories of women are so much larger, what can we do to enliven them? How do we bring their identities and ideas to the fore? If the literary tools have something to offer, I believe we must try. This is the promise of fictocriticism. It is permission to write differently, to write passionately and to be unencumbered by convention in service to a noble purpose.

Writing differently also displaces the roots of power, which is key to the feminist agenda. (Pullen and Rhodes 2008; Rhodes 2015). It places the author in a trusted, but highly visible position. In the reading of conventional history, the historian is often invisible; simply a medium to convey the facts. As a feminist, I reject the idea of being morally-superior in my fact-telling. And for the history of some women, the so-called facts may never be enough to cast a superiorly convincing account, because the methods of collecting the facts, the limited and partial traces available, and the patriarchal approaches are exclusionary from the start.

We need to get away from the additive approach to history and the idea of contributing to a 'grand narrative'. To do so, we must refute the idea of the *real* and replace it with a *cultural creation* (Munslow 2010; Linden 2012). However, the objective is not just to write to undo a history and replace it with a new story, nor do I wish to create a troubling coupling between the feminine as fiction and the masculine as history (or truth). Rather, fictocriticism is a practice of writing, which authentically appreciates the limitations which are imposed by convention and creates room for something more.

If we can accept that history is a symbolic project and not the objective representation of the past, opportunity emerges. Munslow (2010); Scott (1988) and Rose (2010) all suggest we must never lose

our skepticism of what is considered history. In the case of women and gender(ed) history, this is even more so. If we know our purpose, which I argue here is broader than a simple recanting of a life through fact-telling, a well-researched, well-conceived and (birthed) persuasive work of historical fiction is a compelling approach.

I want to offer a more intimate account, which attends to remarkability of Viola. I want my writing to covey the way I feel about her. In this effort, I am 'distinctly present in my writing' (Weatherall 2018, 10). I will raise her voice up, and I will share her lost knowledge. And where there is insufficient understanding, I will offer my voice and my knowledge in support. By doing so, I give myself and you (as my reader) permission to feel passion, anger and joy. Passion is the seed of advocacy. Passion is the seed of change.

Finding Viola

Personal reflection

As I work on this manuscript, anti-black racism and the senseless and brutal assaults and deaths of black people continues. There are shocking daily reports of violence targeted towards people of colour in North American. So, let me pause and reflect on the broader backdrop of what is going on in this world, at this time. It is important to be an ally, but the performative nature of allyship is highly problematic. Allyship needs to be authentic if I am truly trying to demonstrate solidarity. Allyship needs to involve real action. I have come to realize that my writing is my action and it is how I enact my advocacy. Viola's broader recognition will be the social justice outcome.

Viola represents not only hope and justice as a civil rights leader, but as a highly visible mentor to young black men and women, who continue to fight systemic racism in every aspect of life. I also hope her story inspires more accountability in our scholarship, and in our practice. It has been 74 years since Viola stood up to racism in my home province of Nova Scotia. The durability of racism is a shared failure. It is not only happening when one man is murdered in the street by police officers in the US in 2020. Systemic racism is about the circumstances by which that horrific crime was permitted to occur and the egregious actions of so-called 'peace officers' and systems, which supported them.

My grief or guilt as a white person is not enough. No pathetic attempts to clear my conscience by offering empty expressions of support. No standing behind organizational values which we can all pretend oppose racism but are rather the very structures which reinforce them. I am trying to fight the system from within, with the skills I have and the passion, anger and sadness I feel. And I am not looking for recognition. Please give that to Viola's sister, Wanda Robson, for she is the one that was brave enough to take the first step; to surface Viola's injustice and pave the way for broader recognition and accountability. What I am looking for is strength and a way to negotiate a meaningful role as an advocate and ally. There have been hundreds of times when I could have abandoned this work; making an excuse that I was not the right one to tell this part of Viola's story. And I have shouldered some intense critique as I have attempted to find my way. It is hard, but I must and will do it. I will not be fragile (DiAngelo 2011).

> If you're not angry, you're either a stone, or you're too sick to be angry. You should be angry. You must not be bitter. Bitterness is like cancer. It eats upon the host. It doesn't do anything to the object of its displeasure. So use that anger, yes. You write it. You paint it. You dance it. You march it. You vote it. You do everything about it. You talk it. Never stop talking it. (Interview between Dave Chappelle and Maya Angelou from May 29, 2014 from Iconoclast).

Limited sources

The sources that I have drawn on consist of three books, all of which incorporate Viola's sister's first-person accountings[7] and copies of provincial records (e.g. the formal account of the Nova Scotia Apology and Royal Prerogative of Mercy Free Pardon, and notes from The Promised Land Project

Symposium Roundtable Discussion of 2011). Additionally, some information is housed in the Wanda Robson and Viola Desmond Collection at the Beaton Institute at Cape Breton University, Nova Scotia. The collection housed in the Nova Scotia Archives is focused on historic newspaper coverage. Current press was also valuable. However, as I have alluded to, even with these sources to draw on, the traces regarding Viola's business identity are inadequate.

The contested past and present views of Viola

The period of Viola's life to which I am most concerned with is between 1937 and 1946, from when she started her business, to the events which led to the development of her as a civil rights icon. Viola has been effectively socially constructed as a civil rights leader – and that construction is ongoing. The official apology advocated by her sister, Wanda, did much to inform the reporting which was to follow, and reads in part:

> […] On April 15, 2010, the province of Nova Scotia granted an official apology and free pardon to the late Mrs. Viola Desmond who was wrongfully fined and jailed for sitting in the white people's section of a New Glasgow movie theatre in 1946 […] A free pardon is based on innocence and recognizes that a conviction was in error. A free pardon is an extraordinary remedy and is considered only in the rarest of circumstances […] A Royal Prerogative of Mercy Free Pardon is meant to right a wrong (as cited in Reynolds, Clarke, and Robson 2016, 84).

What is clearer today was not so clear in 1946 and 1947. Then, Viola was a highly contested figure, simultaneously described as a convicted criminal who defrauded the government and an embarrassment to her family on the one hand, and then on the other, a victim of false arrest, false imprisonment, assault and malicious persecution. She is also contradictorily described as both perseverant and reluctant, as paving the way for a broader movement and not galvanizing significant attention. As evidenced by the news coverage of the day, Viola was seen as a criminal. This status served to not only smear her reputation, but that of her family's as well (who were often named in the coverage e.g. see Nova Scotia Archives: *The Clarion*, 1946). Despite the attempts of today's media coverage which have recast Viola in a different light, the news of her time was quite different (e.g. see Kassam 2018). Viola's action did galvanize some community support in her time, but it is important to appreciate that segregation was not ended for nearly another decade. It is through the efforts of her sister in recent years that Viola was finally pardoned and recognized for the brave action that she took: 'Desmond could trigger no mass protest. She struggled – and suffered – alone. She was no symbol; she was a martyr' (Clarke as cited in Reynolds, Clarke, and Robson 2016).

Today, Viola is undergoing a different kind of social construction in the press, largely informed by her sister's efforts to valourize her remarkable bravery and Canada's desire to acknowledge an overlooked hero. Viola deserves validation and as a result, she has become a flashpoint for both Canadian pride and shame.

Why is it important to have a figure like Viola Desmond in Canada? Reynolds, Clarke, and Robson (2016) offers this perspective:

> Viola Desmond's free pardon in 2010 was a significant action in righting a longstanding wrong and in raising public awareness about the practice of racial segregation that existing in Canada for most of the twentieth century. In a matter of a few short years, Viola Desmond has moved from historical obscurity to an inspiration for all Canadians as well as a symbol of her generation's fight to end racial segregation and discrimination in Canada (175).

For Viola today, there is a stubborn, but effective moniker which has been reproduced extensively: Viola is *Canada's Rosa Parks*.[8] This moniker accompanies most popular press and has even found its way into the installation at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. The emphasis in various media tributes are the details which pertain to her experience in the New Glasgow theatre in 1946. Those familiar with her story, also know that Viola's actions came nine years earlier than Rosa's. It is rather a clever tactic to have Viola brave actions conflated with a similar episode and thus reified and abstracted. Such rhetorical strategies are powerful politically for igniting new thinking. Some even

suggest that there is a direct link between Viola's act and the abolition of segregation. This speaks to some temporal manipulation to aid a particularly powerful discourse. Does it matter? Is the outcome not more important? *Does she not inspire?*

I do believe that the discourse of valourization is not only fitting, but incredibly important to the moral development of Canada. Should we care if there has been some manipulation to aid in this effort? I do not think so. Where it serves to neglect Viola's broader value is where I take exception and that is what I want to change. Her role as an entrepreneur is downplayed in all accounts. She is variously but minimally described as a businesswoman, a hairdresser, a beautician, a beauty salon owner and the creator of cosmetics and hair pieces. She is not described as a groundbreaking female African Nova Scotia entrepreneur, innovator, community leader and mentor.

Personal reflection

Viola was more than a one dimensional heroine. Her lessons are lost to history; lost by the way we privilege certain voices at the cost of others, historically and presently; obfuscated by well-intentioned efforts to socially construct her as a heroine of civil rights. It has taken a herculean effort by her sister Wanda to have her recognized at all. Will it take an equally significant effort to have her seen as more? Can her story help us understand some of what management and organizational studies is missing? What potential practices and contributions to theory might she have contributed? She is another missing figure of significance who should have played a role in developing our understanding of organizations, organizing and the organized.

Revealing a different Viola – the beginnings

Viola was one of 15 children born to Gwendolyn Irene (née Johnson) and James Albert Davis in Halifax, Nova Scotia (Robson and Caplan 2010). She was born on July 6, 1914 (Nyarko 2016). She was one of 11 siblings to survive childhood and the youngest of the elder sisters (9 sisters in all) (Robson and Caplan 2010).

Viola's grandfather on her maternal side, was a Baptist minister and the family was very religious (Robson and Caplan 2010). Viola's mother was an active advocate, who often wrote letters to newspapers when she thought something was 'politically, educationally or racially wrong' (Robson and Caplan 2010, 22). Her father was self-taught and had intermittent work during the Great Depression cutting hair and washing cars (Robson and Caplan 2010). It was particularly tough environment to grow up in and Wanda (Viola's sister) remarks openly about the family's talent for making 'food stretch' and working closely as a family to support the full duties of a busy household (Robson and Caplan 2010, 34).

While some of Viola's siblings helped with income, others went to school. Viola did both. Viola first trained as a teacher and then earned several professional certificates in cosmetology before opening her first salon in Halifax.

Viola was a 'topnotch' student and studied at Sir Joseph Howe Elementary School and Bloomfield High School (Wanda Robson and Viola Desmond Collection 2008–2014; Robson and Caplan 2010, 35). Her sister describes her as very particular and needing everything 'to be correct' (Robson and cited in Robson and Caplan 2010, 35). In her time, Halifax did not hire black teachers, but as an African Nova Scotian, you could obtain a special certificate which permitted you to teach in the 'black-only' schools of Hammonds Plains, Preston and Africville (Robson and Caplan 2010). Viola obtained her certificate and was teaching by age 16 in Preston (Robson and Caplan 2010; Canada's Walk of Fame 2017). In 1936, Viola married Jack Desmond (Wanda Robson and Viola Desmond Collection 2008–2014).

Viola's business identity: Viola the entrepreneur

Viola's orientation toward business and entrepreneurial approaches is shared in a very restricted and haphazard way through her sister's recollections and story-telling. As I have said, it was not Wanda'

focus. I am disappointed that I cannot share the many innovative strategies that Viola must have employed to enable her success. The reality is that there has not been a significant effort to truly understand Viola's contributions leadership, entrepreneurial theory and praxis.

Viola was actually criticized by her family for not being domestic in inclination and avoiding the family duties: 'Viola seldom baked' (Robson as cited in Robson and Caplan 2010, 47); 'she was given lighter duties because she was so tiny, and had a tiny voice, and she was always reading […] Viola, you know she's delicate' (46-47). If I look very hard, I can see and perhaps imagine that Viola had a different focus not understood by her family. Something not understood is also something perhaps not appreciated entirely and as a result, receives very little focus and attention. I have a much more fragmented text to draw on than with my past research into historical figures (Williams and Mills 2017, 2018, 2019). As a result, it is difficult to draw out all of the insights and potential lessons Viola might have offered to our study and understanding of management and organizations.

Viola was greatly inspired by Madam C.J. Walker[9] (Robson and Caplan 2010, 36–38). Walker's success, by Wanda's account, is what encouraged Viola on her path to entrepreneurship (Robson and Caplan 2010). In the 1930s, vocational training facilities were not open to black women and there were no black women working professionally in the field of cosmetology in Halifax. To pursue her dreams, Viola saved her money from teaching and went on to study the trade in Montreal, New York and New Jersey (Robson and Caplan 2010; Bank of Canada 2016).

Viola was clearly driven, and she saw an opportunity and need:

> Viola started her business. And, believe me, it was long overdue. And the women came to her. Woman are human beings, whether they are black or white – they are women. They want to look good, they want to go out to a party. (Robson as cited in Robson and Caplan 2010, 40)

After training she returned to Halifax where she started her business in 1937, called *Vi's Studio of Beauty Culture*[10] (Bank of Canada 2016). The beauty parlour, specifically devoted to serving black women 'became a gathering place for women in the community' (Bank of Canada 2016). The store was first established in her family home but then grew to be a standalone store in the north end of Halifax, on Gottingen Street (Robson and Caplan 2010). Her self-made and hand-crafted products expanded: face powder, perfumes, lipsticks, hair dye, hair pomade, hair pieces, falls, chignons and wigs (Robson and Caplan 2010; Bingham and Yarhi 2013). Within a few years, she established the *Desmond School of Beauty Culture* which drew students from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Quebec (Bank of Canada 2016). She also created another enterprise to manufacture, market and sell her products (*Vi's Beauty Products*) and generated orders from across Nova Scotia (Bank of Canada 2016). She was regarded as a role model and community leader and inspired those around her (Bank of Canada 2016).

If I examine the very restricted text, I can extrapolate that Viola relied on an attitude and disposition towards business which today, we can appreciate as an ***entrepreneurial mindset***[11], though even stating that is problematic. Entrepreneurship is shaped and defined not only in masculinist terms, but capitalistic ones as well and these ideologies are colonialist. How then do we understand Viola and her story?

Wanda describes her sister as a young woman who was ***committed to learning*** as her parents stressed education and reading. She trained as a teacher, one of the few occupations open to her, and then used her wages to procure professional development out of the country. She did what was necessary to chase her dream and to learn and grow as a ***professional*** in her field – an entirely ***new industry*** in Canada.

As an entrepreneur and business owner, she was very ***focused***: 'being there for her customers came first, and second or third was herself' (Robson and cited in Robson and Caplan 2010, 44). She was ***dedicated*** and ***hardworking***: 'she worked full days, six day a week' (42).

> Viola just about starved herself. I don't think it was to keep her figure […] it was more that she had created a pattern of living – get up in the morning, and get to work, and get going. She was so driven. (Robson as cited in Robson and Caplan 2010, 43)

Viola was rewarded by her hard work and dedication: 'she was, you know, reliable and hardworking. And the business grew' (Robson as cited in Robson and Caplan 2010, 41).

Viola developed a personal ***brand identity***. Her reputation was everything. Her image appeared on all of her products, which she made by hand. Her name was associated with all of her business activities (salon, training school and product sales). She was an ***innovator*** and a ***craftswoman***, committed to ***quality***: 'Viola made hairpieces, falls, chignons and wigs. That was a very painstaking process, it takes a long time' (Robson as cited in Robson and Caplan 2010, 41).

Like many great leaders, she was exceedingly ***generous***. She took care of those around her, by supporting her family, creating a community space in her studio for women to gather and meet, and offering her services for free when needed: 'Viola did hair for the girls going to the proms, dances, even funerals […] that work was always gratis' (Robson as cited in Robson and Caplan 2010, 40).

Viola also continued to expand her business. She not only created a new industry, but she also expanded its reach west to New Brunswick and Quebec. She continued to create new products and services. She was also a skilled ***mentor and teacher***. She was keen for more young black women to have careers and be successful.

Discussion

Personal reflection

The news is a torrent of anger and sadness and inhuman deeds and inhuman responses. Everywhere I turn, there are examples in the extreme. On this backdrop, I write about the formidable nature of Viola. Because she is extraordinary. Because she is inspiring. Because we need her right now. I need her right now.

> The Black female is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power. The fact that the adult American Negro female emerges a formidable character is often met with amazement, distaste and even belligerence. It is seldom accepted as an inevitable outcome of the struggle won by survivors and deserves respect if not enthusiastic acceptance. (Angelou 1969, 231).

Understanding Viola's identity in context: race, class and gender

In this section, I attempt to make sense of the intersecting discourses of race, class and gender and how these affected Viola's life, in addition to hiding the value of her accomplishments and lessons (Crenshaw 1991; Hill Collins [1990] 2000). The experience of a pioneering Canadian black female entrepreneur is also incredibly unique and valuable to our understanding the marginalization discourse within entrepreneurship. Gender oppression is linked to other forms of oppression and are historically and socially constructed (Hirschman 1996). 'Women of colour have been negatively affected disproportionately by social and economic injustices brought about through structural forms of power' (Knight 2016, 312). Dill and Zambrana (2009) also offer a taxonomy of how power is organization and maintained over time using four interconnected realms. These realms include (1) structure (institutions), (2) discipline (practices which sustain normative hierarchies), (3) hegemony (ideology), and (4) interpersonal (patterns of interaction) (Dill and Zambrana 2009; Knight 2016). These realms of power would have affected Viola, and continue to affect women and women of colour today.

To fully appreciate Viola's lost contributions to management and entrepreneurship, we must also contextualize her story in the specific discourse of racialized women entrepreneurs. Even today, 'racialized women are more likely to operate on a small scale, in labour-intensive businesses characterized by low profits and limited mobility' (Knight 2016, 310). Against this present day understanding of the experience of racialized women entrepreneurs, we begin to understand how exceptional

Viola was and how tenacious she must have been. She was not lucky, she was smart, tough and brave! For her, the advantages of accessible higher education and vocational training were withheld. She also lived in segregated society. And yet, she was a forerunner of a new model of business and created three effective and profitable verticals. Her business expanded beyond a local regional area. She trained women to seek their own financial freedom. She even invested in real estate to improve infrastructure (Reynolds and Robson 2018).

People of colour in North America have complex cultural origins and historical experiences (informed by the legacies of colonialism, slavery and immigration) which shaped (and continue to shape) economic life (Knight 2004). 'The labor market was segregated by gender and racially stratified' (Mills 2015, 419). For black women, we can add to this complex framing: poverty, sexual aggression, battery and rape, to a broader understanding of the shared experience in a system of domination and oppression (see Crenshaw 1991).

According to critical scholars, the current study of 'ethnic' entrepreneurship is undertheorized, and our narrow understanding extends to the experiences of predominantly entrepreneurial males and immigrant groups' inclination towards self-employment (Knight 2004; Mills 2015). Black women are cast in history routinely as *domestic social capital* (i.e. caregivers) not *enterprising individuals* (Knight 2004). Further, entrepreneurial business activity is framed as organizing around specific ethnic and cultural markets and locations[12] in an informal or 'underground economy' (Knight 2004, 105), firmly placing it outside of theorized and accepted capitalist modes of production.

More recently, black entrepreneurship has been theorized as a *cultural practice* in the context of *black diasporic discourses* (Walcott 2003). Black feminists have been exploring the intersection of race, class and gender to understand identity and subjectivities and inform praxis (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013; Mills 2015). And many have found that black women's experience is not widely understood (see Harvey 2005). Thus, individuals like Viola become hidden, but her story is a critical addition to scholarship.

Today, individuals who do not conform to the normative stereotype of the entrepreneur (who is white, male and heroic) will not have access to the same resources nor be viewed as having the same kind of legitimate claim to the term entrepreneur (Dy, Marlow, and Martin 2017). And this is interesting because women have historically participated in a range of entrepreneurial activities (Hamilton, 1994), which requires them to 'gather and exploit resources and navigate complex barriers to their full participation' (Essers, Benschop, and Dooreward 2010; Al-Dajani and Marlow 2013; Forson 2013; as cited in Dy, Marlow, and Martin 2017).

Female leadership in black entrepreneurship

In Canada, the history of black entrepreneurship was an activity which often resulted from a lack of potential work and the need to survive (Knight 2016). People of African descent have lived in Nova Scotia since the 1600s (Hamilton, 1994). In 1783, Black Loyalists who came to Nova Scotia were promised liberty but there were no fair opportunities and in many cases, they were forced to indenture themselves (Hamilton, 1994). To survive, a black woman 'had to battle slavery, servitude, sexual and racial discrimination and ridicule. Her tenacious spirit has been her strongest and most constant ally' (Hamilton, 1994, 13). One hundred and fifty years later, Viola entrepreneurial identity is informed by that history.

Viola's role in supporting the women of her community also reveals the vestiges of those historic barriers and her desire to see greater emancipation, health and wealth. Black feminist leadership is about changing cultural norms (Lyle Wilson 2019). Clearly Viola saw mentorship is an avenue for her own success and she passed that advantage on to her students. Today, black female mentorship is understood as critical to achieving success (Grant 2012). Viola can be seen as a forerunner in formalizing this opportunity for young professional women. What Viola did to support women in her community, is remarkable. This might have been her biggest contribution to our understanding of female leadership models in black entrepreneurship.

Viola's business was not a simple 'beauty parlour' – such descriptions (feminine descriptions) really belittle what she did. She built a social-purpose organization. She achieved a level of success and independence in a segregated society and she wanted to give that opportunity to other women. She did so through her products and services and training – uniquely design for black women. Black women's perceptions of their body, hair, skin colour is rooted in social, political and economic conditions which extend back to slavery (Okazawa-Rey, Robinson, and Ward 1986). Whiteness was used as a yardstick to measure beauty (Tate 2007). Viola understood that women simultaneously sought refuge from objectification, but also wanted to develop an attractive self-concept, self-love, confidence and access[13] (DeLoach 2006).

Viola's products and services were about more than just beauty; she gave women a sense of self-belief and dignity. It was also about the politics of visibility and had performative effects (Tate 2007). Her services and products reduced feelings of shame and stigma, and helped black women navigate a complex classist and racist environment. Although it can be argued that her work reinforced white beauty norms and helped women fit into the dominate white beauty paradigm of the time, Viola's services also provided a bridge to confidence, empowerment and acceptance. When an environment offers neither industry or society inclusion, such acceptance often meant employment and success.

Even here, I am concerned with making associations with management and entrepreneurial literature which stems from a capitalist sensibility, though I realize the value and advantage it provides to allow for Viola's contributions to be seen in this light. However, it presumes that Viola's thinking was so informed and gives no credit to her work ethic and drive being the product of very different personal lived experience. This is a challenge to the field itself. What I do see is relatable and instructive; Viola was a woman with strong values, drive and personal power, which she exercised in innovative and material ways, resulting in undeniable success. Her success needs to be appreciated in the context of the constraints that she would have faced as a marginalized actor within the broader web of complex discourses. She did not 'transcend' through merit the 'hegemonic conceptions of the entrepreneur' and the associated barriers faced by marginalized individuals (Dy, Marlow, and Martin 2017, 288). She fought hard to break through them. Decades have passed, and women, people of colour, and immigrants all remain 'others' within the discourse of entrepreneurship (Dy, Marlow, and Martin 2017).

Further discourses at work – seeking but not finding

There are several discourses which worked together to ensure the neglect of entrepreneurial recognition for Viola. Indeed, had it not been for the hints that Wanda shared, I do wonder if we might have lost Viola's broader story forever. Her role as a female leader in black entrepreneurship helps us understand how exceptional she was and how many barriers she needed to overthrow to achieve what she did. And though the race, class and gender barriers are perhaps a bit more obvious explanations for overlooking Viola, there are two other significant discourses that I detected at work.

The first of these discourses concerns her valourization. Her role as a civil rights icon is powerful and leaves little room for other aspects of Viola's accomplishments to be surfaced. It is an unwittingly regrettable product of her present profile which has been reified to such an extent, that she is often just thought of as *Canada's Rosa Parks*. I have seen this before with female historical actors. When they do achieve some sort of recognition, it is typically one dimensional and limited and she is not afforded the opportunity to be recognized with a broader resume (Williams and Mills 2017, 2018). Her entrepreneurial identity is hidden behind a bolder more captivating one, which tracks with an image we already accept. Viola as this formidable, industry building entrepreneur is significantly harder to make sense of both in the past and the present, due to the limited heuristics we have of the successful entrepreneur. This is the very reason her entrepreneurial identity needs to be surfaced, so that we can understand not only what has been achieved with remarkable effort, but

to also help dismantle the barriers which might make success more achievable for today's black business leaders and entrepreneurs.

There is a second significant, but less obvious discourse which serves to exclude many early theorists, including Viola; namely that the development of our field in management and organizational studies has been exclusionary from the onset. Specifically, Canadians were excluded from consideration when the field emerged (see Genoe McLaren and Mills 2015), even though several others from the US and Europe were selectively coopted into the field as early theorists (Urwick and Brech 1944; 1951; Urwick 1987). Many now equate the industrial revolution and the lessons of figures like Henri Fayol (1841–1925), Lyndall Urwick (1891–1983) and Frederick Taylor (1856–1915) as the beginnings of the field of management and organizational studies. Much of our historical understanding of the field was written by theorists like Urwick whose conception of the field was first published in 1943 (*The Elements of Business Administration*). He later penned *Making of Scientific Management*, in 1945. These efforts were inspired by his interest to improve management education by treating management like a science. Thus, these teachings shaped our early understandings of not only what was important theory, but who were important pioneers.

In Canada, the *Symons' Report* of 1975 reveals some of the reasons that figures like Viola were overlooked both as an early contributor to theory in Canada, but also as a demonstration of entrepreneurship in practice. The Commission on Canadian Studies was appointed by the Association of University and Colleges in Canada to study and make recommendations on the state of teaching and research in various fields of study related to Canada and its universities. The Commission wanted to understand the state of university curriculum, the cross-section of professional studies, the state of Canadian archives and the quality of such materials available for study (Symons 1975). There were several failings noted in the extensive report and one of these was the failure to represent the participation of a variety of economic subjects and that the majority of fields of scholarly inquiry were driven by funding (Symons 1975). One of the recommendations called specifically for more studies related to Canada and insisted on 'the widest possible range of documentary materials be preserved for future research' (7). So much of what Canada has archived and the propensities of research are clearly driven by various discrete interests. These interests are all together exclusionary, capitalistic, patriarchal and racist. It is not hard to imagine that figures like Viola would be ignored in a system which failed to capture its own complex history.

Viola's archives which span the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (Manitoba), the Nova Scotia Archives, and the Beaton Institute at Cape Breton University (Nova Scotia) all focused almost entirely on her court case. The efforts to memorialize Viola have been entirely focused on her role as a civil rights leader. The effort to bring her entrepreneurial identity to light has required a steadfast and targeted effort to seek the traces which reveal more than the dominant narrative.

Beyond scholarly inquiry – research and praxis

Nearly three years ago, I undertook a nomination application for Viola to be recognized by the Nova Scotia Business Hall of Fame. I not only want her business and leadership lessons recognized by scholarship and academia, but by fellow business leaders and entrepreneurs. Though not taken seriously in the first year of application, she was finally shortlisted in the second year. It was not until the third year that she was ultimately selected for the award. It took years to socialize committees as to the merit of her accomplishments and her as a figure worth of recognition. Again, she did not track with contemporary ideas of the successful entrepreneur. But, despite setbacks, it has come to pass. She will be the 100th Laureate of the Nova Scotia Business Hall of Fame, which is a recognition award for a lifetime achievement as an industry builder, innovator and entrepreneur.

During this effort, I have found other allies who also feel strongly about Viola's neglected recognition in business. There is a change mounting in support of Viola, the entrepreneur, as scholarly conversations bleed over into social justice and praxis, and vice versa. Here is an excerpt from a letter of

recommendation in support of Viola by SI Rustum Southwell, a noted black business community leader and CEO of Black Business Initiative. In it, you can see the pride and desire to see Viola in this new light:

> Ms. Desmond was a great entrepreneur, trailblazer and activist for the Black community; her story of business success continues to inspire many to this day.
>
> Ms. Desmond is known throughout Canada as a social justice icon, but she was also a great innovator and a successful entrepreneur at a time when very few women, let alone women of colour, owned and operated independent businesses. She was a pioneer in the field of Black beauty care, opening doors for dignity and self-worth for Black women through her products, and inspiring and helping others to pursue and attain business success as well. […]
>
> While the events of November 8th, 1946 are recorded as a powerful moment in the history of social justice in this country, we argue that the events were not Ms. Desmond's most significant contribution to Nova Scotia. Her role as a Black female entrepreneur and leader was more groundbreaking and ought to be celebrated. Her success was based on an unwavering tenacity, hard work and an overcoming spirit that sought to face hurdles head-on. Her can do conquering attitude has inspired many over the years, she remains a valuable role model to young people today.
>
> It is Ms. Desmond's day-to-day courage and determination to succeed, her ability to create and manage a vital enterprise that empowered and inspired multitudes, as well as her resolve to breakthrough racial and gender barriers of her time that we celebrate (name deleted to maintain integrity of review process).

Conclusion

Personal reflection

I use the word *love* to describe how I feel about Viola. Perhaps that is strange to some, but in my heart, that feeling of love has been with me and preserved me through this work of learning and telling Viola's story. It is also the reason I call her Viola and not 'Desmond' like in the formal way we refer to 'subjects' in research. Such practices suggest a distance, that I do not feel. She is not a 'subject'; she is a person with whom I have come to know, deeply respect and love. It is my hope that you as my reader can now see her, respect her and can love her as well.

> When we are loving, we openly and honestly express care, affection, responsibility, respect, commitment, and trust. (hooks 2000, 54)

Returning to my purpose

The promise of this paper was to illustrate how a novel feminist approach can reveal an overlooked historical female figure. Investigating Viola's story revealed that she has been marginalized by a web of interlocking discourses. For Viola, these discourses spanned the 'usual suspects' of race, class and gender, but they also included her own current valourization discourse and the propensity of certain practices within our field of management and organizational studies in Canada and beyond. My goal was to elevate the entrepreneurial accomplishments and lessons of Viola Desmond, and to test the utility of prowoman polemical writing fused with fictocritical strategies and autoethnography. I hope that I have shared with you a persuasive and powerful account of Viola so that she can be seen as the remarkable groundbreaking entrepreneur, industry builder, mentor and community leader that she was. This work has spilled over into praxis. Not only am I writing as an advocate in scholarship, but I have worked to ensure she receives public recognition. And for practical reasons, I wanted this recognition to come from business leaders and the business community.

Viola's story helps us to challenge our lack of understanding, appreciation and inclusion for models of female leadership in black entrepreneurship and their valuable contributions to our knowledge of management and organizations. By enlivening historical figures, we make them real in the here and now; capable of being admired and capable of inspiring. I have allowed my

passion to be present in this writing, because I sincerely believe Viola is worthy of our attention as scholars and writers of history and I wanted to inspire an emotive response in you, the reader. I selected a radical kind of theory and approach because I believe it is effective and because it is also symbolic of how necessary it is to think and write differently in order for new knowledge to emerge. All knowledge is discursive, and all lenses are limited in some way, but just as it is important to have many different figures contribute to our understanding of management and organizations, it is also important to draw on different ways of knowing and producing knowledge.

As a feminist engaged in critical historiography, I have been left disappointed with the process of uncovering mere fragments, contestations and contradictions. I have been frustrated by the discourses which hide women and their accomplishments from view. It is a worthy exercise for sure, but just surfacing fragments has left the story-teller in me with an unsatisfactory and incomplete account of what I imagine to be remarkable women, like Viola. Therefore, my approach here has been to start to build a fuller, plausible and inspiring profile, a woman with a broad resume of accomplishments. In order to do that, I had to share my journey of getting to know her as a literary a mechanism for engaging you in the same kind of journey.

The end and the beginning

I know that this is not the end to Viola's story. As I have argued, history-making happens in the present. When I began to get to know Viola, I could not understand why her role as an entrepreneur was not playing out as a significant part of her story. To me, it spoke of her strength and innate passion. It helped to explain her leadership potential in the sphere of civil rights as she had so clearly been a successful business leader, mentor and community builder. I felt an urgency to ensure that the efforts underway to recognize and celebrate Viola did not permanently blind us to her accomplishments as a successful entrepreneur. Some narratives are so powerful and persuasive that they subsume all others. This necessitates an equally powerful and destabilizing approach to enact social justice on a number of fronts: to ensure Viola's entrepreneurial achievements are also visible; to ensure that Viola is recognized as an important, but overlooked contributor to our understanding of female leadership and black entrepreneurship; to advocate for a continued challenge to the prevailing approaches in the study of management and organizations; and finally, to illustrate a connection to praxis and the opportunity for social change through activist academic writing.

Today, Canadians seem to be falling all over themselves to catch up in their knowledge of and appreciation for Viola. I think I am guilty of this too. I (like I imagine many Canadians) want to undo the harm Viola experienced in the past and transform her into an instrument of pride and a symbol of change in the present and future. In a strange display of pride, she has become an instrument of opportunity with theatre shows, restaurants, and scholarships, all seeking to use her name. This is a fascinating thing to witness as her story evolves more and more to be useful to the needs of the present. None of this diminishes the remarkable life of Viola. I believe she can be remembered as both a civil rights leader and groundbreaking African Nova Scotian entrepreneur. Her story is important.

My feminist agenda is to raise awareness, rouse social change and challenge thought. I brought that agenda to this investigation to serve Viola and to hopefully ignite additionally scholarly interest along with identifying her as a historical mentor for today's enterprising youth eager to follow in her same footsteps. Her entrepreneurial lessons give us an indication of what is required to achieve success under remarkable conditions and these characteristics of tenacity, of excellence in a particular craft, and dedication to ongoing learning are important lessons for all. Viola showed us not only what she did, but what we can do, despite the obstacles in front of each of us. She also has shown us the importance of mentorship and helping others who might need help on their path. I think Viola sense of responsibility to other young women is something I relate most closely to. I have always tried to hold space for the young women in my life who need guidance or support or someone to remind them of just how incredible they truly are. For Viola, she wanted the young women

that came from all over the Maritimes to achieve what she had achieved. She did not view it as competition, she viewed it as responsibility. As Mary Church Terrell first said (and as many have mimicked and repeated):

> And so, lifting as we climb, onward and upward we go, struggling and striving, and hoping that the buds and blossoms of our desires will burst into glorious fruition ere long. With courage, born of success achieved in the past, with a keen sense of the responsibility which we shall continue to assume, we look forward to a future large with promise and hope.

Evident in the investigation into Viola's life is that her lived experience (not just her accomplishments) are the basis for new knowledge (Smith 1988; Harding 2004; Essers 2009). Viola's experiences offer rich insight into the entrepreneurial journey of a woman who challenged the prevailing narrative, thus disrupting the patterns of inquiry and current historicizing of labour activity as nothing more than the survival work of exceptional men of colour, to one to include feminine models and feminine lessons. If we give her the credit which is due, she makes what has been invisible, visible and tangible.

In this age of post truth, there are times when fact is taken as fiction and fiction is taken as fact. And there are times when both prove to be exceptional in their ability to foster new thinking – both helpful and harmful. If we are going to write history, I would rather do so as an author who admits that the work is a combination of fact and fiction, enacted for a noble purpose. Wanda and those who reproduced her ideas did this for Viola and for all of us. Quite remarkably, she has been transformed from *a criminal* to a *victim of racism and abuse*, to a *reluctant civil rights leader*, to a *defiant, revolutionary who led a legal challenge against racial segregation in Canada*. Here, I have added to our understanding of how and why such narratives are designed and how individuals become social constructed (and by whom). I have also participated in the process by adding to Viola's story with a new emphasis on her role as an entrepreneur and business leader. And I have drawn you in as readers to be my collaborators and to share in a passionate new retelling of Viola.

Notes

1. According to African Nova Scotian Affairs (2019), Nova Scotia Canada, African Nova Scotians have a history in Canada which dates back 400 years. African Nova Scotians are not to be confused with Caribbean immigrants which came to Canada starting in the early 1900s and therefore do not self-identify as African Nova Scotian. African Nova Scotians include Black Loyalists who came as refugees, freemen/women, or from the Colonial United States or West Africa as slaves as early as 1604.
2. The term 'black' is used herein to refer to the community within Nova Scotia, Canada, which self identifies as 'black'. This overarching self declaration includes immigrants and African Nova Scotians. I appreciate the sensitivity associated with colour names, notions and labels and drew on Wilder (2010) to develop an understanding of the scope of inquiry into language, colourism, and associated beliefs, attitudes and prejudice.
3. The term Jim Crow refers to a racist caste system, which operated in the United states from 1877 to the mid-1960s. It is considered more than a set of anti-black laws but rather a way of life which promoted anti-black racism (Pilgrim 2012).
4. Though efforts did not culminate in dramatic events as they did in the US, with the landmark Supreme Court decision of 1954 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Canada's development did unfold province by province around the same time. Comprehensive civil rights acts concerning fair accommodation, fair pay and fair employment were passed in Saskatchewan in 1947, Nova Scotia in 1953, 1956, 1959, Ontario in 1962, Alberta in 1966, New Brunswick in 1967, Prince Edward Island in 1968, British Columbia in 1969, Newfoundland in 1969, Manitoba in 1970 and Quebec in 1975. The consolidation of civil rights occurred at the national level in 1982 under the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (see Reynolds and Robson 2018).
5. Fictocriticism is considered a postmodern method, whereas polemics draw on poststructural epistemology.
6. See Ermarth 2007; 2011 who argues agency resides in its enunciation within the discursive condition.
7. Wanda is accepted as a proxy for Viola's own voice and she is the reason Viola is recognized today as a major contributor to civil rights in Canada. Wanda's efforts have somewhat hidden her own role as a significant actor in civil rights, as she has consistently deflected the focus back to Viola.
8. For examples of popular press where Viola is described as Canada's Rosa Parks see Tattrie 2016; Criss 2018; Schmidt 2016; Annett and Stone 2018.

9. An African American entrepreneur, philanthropist, political and social activist, and the first self-made millionaire; starting the *C.J. Walker School of Beauty Culture* (Walker died in 1919).
10. Her sister Wanda recalls the name of the store as *Viola Desmond's Beauty Store* (Robson and Caplan 2010, 41) though several other sources indicate it was *Vi's Studio of Beauty Culture*.
11. 'the ability to sense, act, and mobilize under uncertain conditions' (Haynie et al. 2010, 217).
12. Knight (2004) cites the work of Portes (1981) and the lens of ethnic enclave theory.
13. I fully realize the critique which could be levied on Viola's adoption of 'white' beauty standards. In her time and context, I believe we could construe that she saw these as means to be economically empowered.

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