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# Cis women's bodies at work: co-modification and (in)visibility in organization and management studies and menopause at work scholarship

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## Abstract

This paper reviews research on cis women's bodily self-discipline in the workplace. We compare literature exemplifying the 'bodily turn' in organization and management studies to scholarship on menopause at work, to identify key themes across these oeuvres and the significance of the blind spots in each. There is little overlap between them: only eleven organization and management studies publications dealt with menopause. In classifying these literatures using Forbes' (2009) concept of co-modification, we distil four themes: bodily moulding; non-disclosure; failing; and resistance, redefinition and reclamation. Based on this, we argue for more substantive considerations of menopause in organization and management studies, and suggest what the organization and management literature has to offer its sister scholarship. For example, we foreground how menopause exacerbates the visibility paradox facing female workers which organization and management studies identifies; and argue that menopause at work scholarship should pay more attention to specific bodily accommodations, refusals and the 'unscripted' aspects of menopause in organizations.

## INTRODUCTION

The 'bodily turn' in organization and management studies (OMS) is now firmly established. Most of this scholarship discusses the female body, given its prevailing discursive construction as unsuited to the public sphere. One prominent theme is how women's bodies are subject to workplace discipline, and 'made fit' for the generation of value. The golden thread circuits around organizational discourses about ideal worker bodies, and how women are enjoined to respond. Women's bodies – and so women themselves – are understood as leaky, emotional, hormonal and unreliable (Bell & Sinclair, 2016; Gatrell, 2010,

2013, 2019; Gatrell et al., 2017; Hunter & Kivinen, 2016; Page, 2014; Steidl & Brookshire, 2019; van Amsterdam, 2015). They are identified as physically weak (Bryant & Garnham, 2014; Bryant & Jaworski, 2011; Steidl & Brookshire, 2019) and in thrall to their reproductive capacity or sexuality, so 'naturally' suited to the home (Bryant & Garnham, 2014; Bryant & Jaworski, 2011; Cohen & Wolkowitz, 2018; Driver, 2008; Forbes, 2009; Gatrell, 2013; Gatrell et al., 2017; Haynes, 2017; Hunter & Kivinen, 2016; Steidl & Brookshire, 2019; Trussell, 2015; van Amsterdam, 2015).

In contrast, men's bodies – and therefore men – are defined as rational, intellectual, self-contained, strong, aggressive when necessary and without external

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'encumbrances' like children (Atkinson et al., 2021a; Gatrell, 2013; Gatrell et al., 2017). Male bodies are 'the norm against which women's performance is measured', with organizational discourses othering women's bodies as needing to be managed, made compliant and/or hidden (van den Brink & Stobbe, 2009, 454–455; also see Mavin & Grandy, 2016a, 2016b, 2020; Tazzyman, 2020; Turner & Norwood, 2014). Discursive comparisons to the normative male body create additional challenges for more marginalized women like those with disabilities, women of colour and older women (Jammaers & Williams, 2021; Rabelo et al., 2021; Steffan, 2021).

However, almost all this scholarship overlooks the mid-life female body, and specifically the menopausal body. This body is defined by three distinct stages, referred to as perimenopause, menopause and post-menopause. Perimenopause marks the transition into menopause, characterized by significant decreases in oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone production and the beginning of symptoms but continued (if often irregular) menstruation. The median age for perimenopause is 47.5 (McKinlay et al., 1992). Menopause occurs twelve months following a woman's last menstrual period, and as such lasts only twenty-four hours. On average, a woman in the global north attains menopause at 51 (*ibid.*). Post-menopause follows menopause. Here symptoms may still be experienced, but usually at a lower intensity. Typically, symptoms will last between seven and ten years from onset (Avis et al., 2015). However, the menopausal journey is different for everyone who experiences it: for example, one in every hundred women goes through premature menopause – that is, before the age of 40 (Coulam et al., 1986).

Demographic trends mean the neglect of the menopausal body by OMS is increasingly untenable (Atkinson et al., 2021a; Jack et al., 2019; Steffan, 2021). Women in the global north are working outside of the home in much greater numbers and until later in life than ever before. More than 73% of those aged 45 to 54, and 58% of women aged 55 to 65, are in employment in the United States (US Bureau of Labour Statistics 2021). UK data show that 66.3% of women aged between 50 and 64 are working (Office for National Statistics, 2022). As such many women will experience perimenopause, menopause and post-menopause whilst in employment.

A range of physical and psychological symptoms are widely recognized to be menopause-related, including hot flushes and night sweats, erratic periods, insomnia, fatigue, anxiety, irritability, loss of focus, aches and pains and forgetfulness. An estimate based on representative data from the UK suggests some 54% of women experience at least one symptom which substantially affects their quality of life (Evandrou et al., 2021). Relatedly, symptoms can make working life more challenging. For example,

Gartoulla et al.'s (2016) survey of Australian women finds those describing their work ability as poor to moderate reporting hot flushes and night sweats much more frequently than those rating their work ability at higher levels. Work can also exacerbate symptoms: e.g., stress caused by formal meetings, deadlines and training and development might increase the frequency of hot flushes (Griffiths et al., 2006; Park et al., 2008, 2011; Paul, 2003; Putnam & Bochantin, 2009; Reynolds, 1999). Mid-life menopausal bodies, prone as they may be to flushing and sweating, psychological fluctuations and erratic and heavy periods *inter alia*, can therefore cause problems for women at work.

And yet OMS almost completely ignores the menopause. Scholarship around the intersections between reproductive stages and work focuses instead on pregnant and maternal bodies.<sup>1</sup> Even though literature on corporeal workplace expectations has burgeoned in the last few decades, our discipline has a significant blind spot when it comes to menopausal women's responses – despite the pressing demographic and socioeconomic, not to say legal,<sup>2</sup> cases for better understanding of their experiences.

For the paper at hand, we originally set out to evaluate the OMS literature via menopause at work (MAW) scholarship to make the case for OMS to better address this blind spot. However, as we proceeded, we realized this was insufficient because MAW also has lessons to learn from OMS, especially since the MAW corpus is much smaller. In bringing these bodies of work together, we aim to foster an intellectual conversation between scholars involved in each, given their similar interests. At present this is very limited, with only a handful of authors contributing to both. Gavin Jack and Kathleen Riach are arguably the most notable amongst this group. As such the two literatures remain quite separate.

Therefore, we review the empirical literature on women's bodies and organizations through the lens of empirical research on MAW and vice versa. Our research questions are:

1. What can the menopause at work literature tell us about conceptual and empirical blind spots in the organization and management studies literature on cis women's bodies, and why does this matter?
2. What can the organization and management studies literature on cis women's bodies tell us about these blind spots in the menopause at work literature, and why does this matter?

In the main body of the paper, we address the first part of these questions by identifying four themes describing how women respond to the discursive preference for male bodies in the workplace. Here we are inspired by, but also add to, Forbes' (2009) concept of organizational

co-modification. Our first two themes are bodily moulding and non-disclosure, which reflect women's accommodation strategies – that is, how they adapt their bodies. The third theme is the failure of these strategies, where attempts to make the 'problematic' female body invisible are not successful. The fourth theme reflects efforts to change organizational environments as opposed to changing the body; in other words, women's resistance to, and reclamation or redefinition of, bodily norms at work. Across each theme we foreground both commonalities and oversights in each literature. In our discussion and conclusion we reflect on the importance of these oversights and address why they matter, suggesting new ways forward for OMS and MAW research. Examples of our proposed research agenda include suggesting OMS scholars attend more closely to specific difficulties of having a menopausal body at work, one which is discursively constructed as not only less productive but also no longer reproductive; and for MAW researchers to incorporate a wider intersectional lens on menopausal workers' lives.

We should add that an extremely significant OMS literature on gender diverse people's experiences of organizations, which often focuses on their bodies, is emerging (see for example Muhr & Sullivan, 2013; Muhr et al., 2016; O'Shea, 2018, 2019, 2020; Thanem & Wallenberg, 2016). Equivalent developments are absent from MAW research. However, we only review the OMS scholarship on cis women's bodies here, for reasons of length.

Next we outline the theoretical frameworks we used to: (1) underpin our reading of these literatures and, (2) subsequently, organize them into our four themes. We then present the methodology for our comparative review. Following this, we explore moulding and non-disclosure in turn as accommodations to workplace bodily norms in the MAW literature and its OMS counterpart. Afterwards, we explore failure to accommodate these norms, followed by consideration of resistance, reclamation and redefinition. Our connecting concepts are visibility and invisibility. Finally, the discussion and conclusion summarizes what each body of literature can offer the other and why the resulting research agenda is important.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

We used the biopsychocultural approach, first, as a broad guiding principle in our reading of the two literatures (Griffiths & Hunter, 2014; Hunter & Rendall, 2007; Jack et al., 2014; Kittell et al., 1998; Mishra & Kuh, 2006; Morris & Symonds, 2004). This perspective accepts that biology matters in our bodily experiences, such as varying levels of certain hormones in perimenopause and pregnancy, but insists we also account for psychological make-up

and societal context. Thus a woman's lived bodily experience is not determined by physiology alone, but also influenced by cultural perceptions of gender, whether she has children, her personality, her lifestyle, her occupation etcetera. This perspective also encompasses much more bodily agency for women than the biomedical standpoint which understands menstruation, say, as failed reproduction or menopause as characterized by deficiency and loss (Martin, 1992). As Jack et al. (2019, p. 126) suggest, the biopsychocultural approach understands bodies as more than 'brute flesh that exist[s] outside cultural conventions and to which human experience can be reduced; [but neither] are they solely a product of signification determined by cultural scripts or discourses written onto the body'. We therefore foregrounded socio-psychological aspects of the literature we read, without ignoring bodily materiality.

Second, the framework through which we present our review is, as suggested above, Forbes' (2009) concept of organizational co-modification. This emerged during our reading as very much in keeping with our biopsychocultural lens in its emphasis on how women manage their bodies for and at work as well as capturing the themes which were coming to light. The first part of the concept focuses on how 'women may *accommodate* the dominant interests and reify hegemonic sexual discourse' (Forbes, 2009, p. 580 – emphasis added), both literally and metaphorically modifying their bodies. Forbes comments on how black women are simultaneously rendered 'visible (physically and sexually) and invisible (organizationally, intellectually, and professionally)' (p. 579) in organizations. Her argument exemplifies the 'visibility paradox', in which women attempt to remain invisible in masculinist workplaces yet need to be visible and perform better than male colleagues to pursue career advancement (van den Brink & Stobbe, 2009; Woodfield, 2016). We use the notion of (in)visibility to highlight how they undertake bodily self-discipline accordingly, depending on their body type, occupation and seniority. The accommodation strategies we discuss are therefore intended either to 'dim' women's bodies (Rydzik & Ellis-Vowles, 2019) or, much less frequently, to make them hyper-visible at work.

In expanding on Forbes's work, we identify three accommodation strategies that cis women undertake at or for work, as induced from our review of MAW and OMS scholarship. The first is bodily *moulding*, where women work on their bodies to shape them in line with workplace expectations. The second strategy is *non-disclosure* of the challenges of having a female body at work. This theme is less common in both MAW and in OMS research. Third, we consider instances of *failed accommodation* where women's bodies are problematically visible at work despite their efforts either to mould them or to stay silent about bodily challenges.

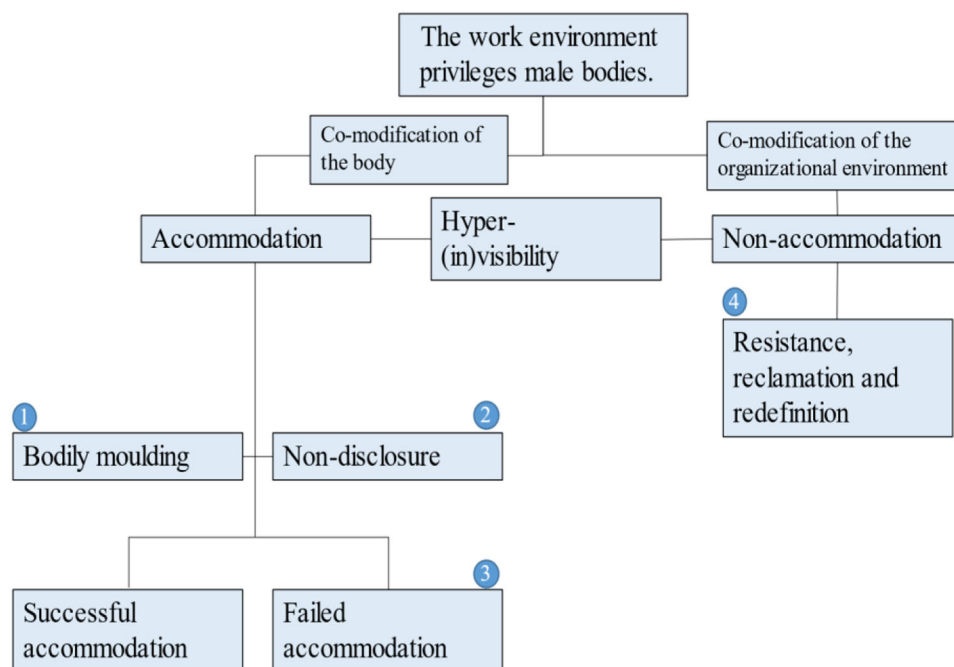


FIGURE 1 Four types of organizational co-modification [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jmr.12318)]

Forbes (2009) also identifies *resistance to*, and *reclamation and redefinition* of, discursive organizational bodily norms as the flip-side in co-modification. Here what is being co-modified are idealized bodily performances at work – that is, the organizational environment itself – rather than women’s bodies, as cis women behave in ways which reconstruct or deconstruct relevant expectations. Again, these behaviours intensify the visibility of their bodies but this is deliberate, representing a refusal to engage in moulding or non-disclosure. Our fourth theme charts such behaviour in both literatures.

Figure 1 therefore outlines our use of Forbes’ concept of co-modification to illustrate how women (attempt to) self-discipline – or not – in response to the discursive preference for male bodies in the workplace, based on our reading of the MAW and OMS literatures.

For each theme, we begin with the MAW research to highlight the importance of this quantitatively smaller literature and forestall the possibility of it fading into the background against its much larger counterpart, and then turn to the OMS literature. This separation is deliberate to keep our line of argument as clear as possible and to highlight the lack of overlap and engagement between the literatures. However, we include a table at the end of each theme to summarize its sub-themes and whether/how they are represented in each literature. We also use bold type throughout to indicate these sub-themes. The (sub-)themes are not mutually exclusive, which we highlight where relevant. Equally, the publications we review often speak to more than one (sub-)theme.

We turn to our methodology next.

## METHODOLOGY

### Scope and boundaries of the review

In order to address research question 1, we conducted a systematic literature review of MAW scholarship. We were inspired in developing a strategy for this review by our UK Government Equalities Office report which synthesized evidence on the connections between menopause and economic participation (Brewis et al., 2017). For the review at hand we used Scopus and 27 other platforms and deployed search terms including ‘work’, ‘employment’, ‘unemployment’, ‘redundancy’, ‘economic’, ‘productivity’, ‘capabilities’, ‘perform’, ‘menopause’, ‘perimenopause’, ‘climacteric’ and ‘premenopause’, with all variations and combinations. Some of the publications considered for the government report, which spanned January 1990 to March 2016 as required by our funders, were re-reviewed to concentrate on empirical research which offers accounts of bodily self-discipline at or for work. We then brought the review up to date by adding research published between April 2016 and December 2020.

Importantly, of the original corpus of MAW literature, we classified only Irni (2009), Jack et al. (2014) and Atkinson et al. (2015) as also belonging to OMS research because these pieces were published either by OMS scholars and/or in OMS outlets. In our updating of this corpus, an

additional eight were identified: Bell and Sinclair (2016); Gatrell et al. (2017), Beck et al. (2018, 2020), Jack et al. (2019), Butler (2020), Atkinson et al. (2021a) and Steffan (2021). The other publications in the MAW scholarship come from fields including communication studies, counselling and therapy, nursing, occupational and industrial health, public health, psychology and the sociology of health.

Most MAW research reviewed here consists of journal papers so as to 'meet minimum scholarly standards' (Stumbitz et al., 2018, p. 504), but we have included some grey literature. Examples include Griffiths et al. (2006, 2010), Jack et al. (2014), National Union of Teachers (2014a, 2014b), Paul (2003) and Trades Union Congress (2014) because they are very well-cited across this scholarship. We also refer to a survey by the Social Issues Research Centre (2002) because, unusually, it reports positive experiences of menopause at work. Further, we use Daysal and Orsini's (2014) IZA discussion paper because, other than two very recent papers which are outside of our date parameters (Bryson et al., 2022; Evandrou et al., 2021), this is the only academic research we have found that discusses women leaving work because of menopause. It is, in addition, methodologically robust.

To identify empirical journal articles in OMS, we undertook another systematic review using Scopus. We already knew the two literatures had a very minimal overlap, as discussed above. We also knew that OMS literature on women's bodies is much larger than MAW scholarship and therefore needed to make our results for the former manageable. Accordingly, we elected to start our search from January 2007 for reasons of sheer practicality and to end it, as with its sister oeuvre, in December 2020. To ensure we were identifying OMS research only, we selected the Business, Management and Accounting subject area in Scopus and searched on Article title, Abstract, Keywords. Our search terms were body OR embodiment OR bodies AND organization OR work OR employment.

Our review of both bodies of work therefore also has the advantage of being highly transdisciplinary, as recommended by Jones and Gatrell (2014).

## Analysis

Using a manual content analysis method, Jo revisited the empirical publications we reviewed for our government report and read the first tranche of OMS articles, developing an inductive set of themes which seemed to characterize the discussions. The decision to focus on bodily self-discipline emerged at this early stage as a very significant motif in both literatures, with Forbes' (2009) co-modification standing out as a useful framework. Vanessa,

Andrea and Jesse then shared the remaining OMS articles to add notes under these themes and refine them; and we divided the post-March 2016 MAW publications between us. We recalibrated our original framework as we progressed to distinguish different types of corporeal workplace accommodation as well as separating out findings indexing failures in this regard, thus developing Forbes' (2009) original co-modification framework; and we nuanced our original resistance theme to encompass reclamation and redefinition, here following Forbes. Our four themes are not equally prevalent in each literature, and we excluded some publications as we proceeded because they didn't capture any of the emerging themes. In total we review 82 pieces here, including the 11 which straddle both areas of research.

We now turn to the first of our co-modification themes, bodily moulding in the MAW scholarship.

## MOULDING THE BODY IN MAW LITERATURE

This strategy involves various concealments to minimize visible menopause symptoms in workplaces, which vary depending on the symptom/s in question. The first is the **use of 'kit'** – things women bring to work to make their menopausal bodies less conspicuous. For example, Putnam and Bochantin (2009) analyse posts to an online forum called 'Menopause Relief at Work'. In one instance, hot flushes were tackled with 'those cold packs that are supposed to stay cold for up to eight hours. ... I also keep a blanket in my filing cabinet and a heater under my desk' (Anti-Mensi, quoted on p. 64). Butler's (2020) participants brought in black cushions for their light grey office chairs in case of menstrual flooding. Kittell et al.'s (1998) US respondents, for whom unpredictable periods were also challenging, also used kit-based strategies including stashing sanitary protection at work, wearing protection just in case and checking it constantly.

**Clothing** is, further, indexed as a moulding strategy: Kittell *et al.*'s respondents often wore darker clothes for work. Similarly, Atkinson et al.'s (2021a) research at three UK police services ( $n = 1197$ ) recounts how one officer takes spare uniform shirts to work because she sweats so much during a hot flush. Steffan's (2021, p. 206) interview respondents dressed in baggy clothing to conceal menopausal weight gain; and one of Butler's (2020, p. 702) respondents chose 'comfortable, nothing clingy, cool, easily washable and non-iron' clothes for work because of her hot flushes.

Another moulding technique is women **concealing themselves** at work. In Jack et al.'s (2019) interviews with Australian university staff, respondents discussed

the difficulties of heavy and erratic periods or hot flushes when they had back-to-back meetings, or were teaching or travelling for work. Some absented themselves from meetings or specific physical environments, hiding themselves as well as their symptoms and arguably exacerbating their workplace invisibility in detrimental ways. Relatedly, Stefan's (2021, p. 208) respondent Isla had lost confidence due to menopause and chose not to put herself forward for a new work opportunity. **Self-care** is also reported in this literature so women can ensure they are always fit for work. Counsellor Janet looked after herself especially well during days off, 'to allow me to be ready and fit to go to clients' (Bodza et al., 2019, p. 550). Here then women use symptom-specific strategies including: workplace 'kit' like blankets or sanitary protection caches, clothing, deliberate absence and self-care to mould their bodies for and at work.

Elsewhere the MAW literature discusses **medical strategies** of moulding, specifically hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Evidence on HRT's efficacy in ameliorating symptoms where they affect work is mixed. After the early 2000s publication of the Women's Health Initiative Study and the Million Women Study, many women stopped taking HRT because of concerns about long-term effects. In a large representative US study, Daysal and Orsini (2014) estimate a 37% decrease in its use. But for some women this backfired. 89% of Cumming et al.'s (2011) survey respondents said their symptoms returned, and 38% said this reduced their ability to work. Daysal and Orsini (2014) found that US women who came off HRT were 30% more likely to leave work altogether, again due to symptoms recurring. Elsewhere 70% of Griffiths et al.'s (2013) survey respondents took HRT partly because it helped them to cope with work, but 25% reported unpleasant side effects like headaches or nausea.

More positive results come from a UK survey of 200 women carried out by the Social Issues Research Centre (SIRC, 2002) where over half suggested HRT had allowed them to stay at work. Similarly, Ariyoshi's (2008, 2009) participants said the medication had reduced problematic impacts of symptoms on their productivity. Nonetheless, even where there are positive outcomes for individual women, medicating the menopausal body to maintain work performance still constitutes accommodation of organizational norms.

We now review the theme of moulding the body as reported in OMS research.

## MOULDING THE BODY IN OMS LITERATURE

The moulding practices reported here also mainly involve minimizing female bodies in masculinist organizational

spaces. They vary depending on bodily type and organizational context. We subdivide this theme into sub-sections for legibility because it is the most prevalent across both literatures.

### Bodily size

Beginning with the **management of size**, as van Amsterdam and van Eck (2019, p. 47) suggest, 'the somatic norms surrounding size seem to be stricter for women' at work. They focus on corporeal accommodation strategies deployed by self-identified fat female employees, like walking quickly to disavow any notion that they were unfit. Equally, these women dressed smartly and ensured their clothing, make-up, hair and cleanliness were immaculate to 'compensate' for being overweight and counter associations with lack of discipline (also see Glass & Cook, 2020; Tazzyman, 2020). Relatedly, Driver (2008, p. 922) comments on how women accommodate workplace bodily norms around size by dieting. In her data, they are described by colleagues as 'always [being] on a diet' as well as eating much less at work than their male co-workers. For example, '[I]f we have pizza at work, the girls probably don't eat as much as they would had they been at home eating it. Most likely because it's a social atmosphere where subconsciously they feel like they're being critiqued'. The scrutiny women feel of their bodies at work is apparent here, as are their attempts to reduce this through eating habits. Again these strategies around body size are intended to dim women's bodies in the workplace.

### Demeanour, appearance and clothing

On bodily size but also **demeanour and appearance** as moulding techniques, Pouthier and Sondak (2021) discuss an art installation created by recording gallery staff interactions over time and then playing them back randomly to visitors and – of course – the all-female staff themselves. Galleries are known for a specific female bodily ideal centring on height, blonde hair pinned back into a bun and a slim body. The constant exposure of the installation made staff even more conscious of apparent non-conformity, worrying about looking overweight or being caught on camera adjusting clothing or slumping in a seat. As such they worked even harder to ensure an appropriate bodily performance.

Gatrell (2013) suggests that senior women in particular are expected to be slim but also self-contained and self-controlled (also see Haynes, 2012). Sometimes, as we have seen in the MAW literature, this involves care in dressing the body for work. The women amongst Glass

and Cook's (2020, 1238–1240) 'non-traditional' leaders (a group also including men of colour) talked of being subject to intense bodily scrutiny and so chose work wear to look 'immaculate', 'feminine but not too feminine' and to distinguish themselves from women lower in the ranks. Comportment-wise, they self-presented as calm even when provoked and, for those of colour, prepared presentations to avoid words where – as they described it – their accents became more pronounced (also see Rabelo et al., 2021). Here we see both **clothing** and **bodily demeanour** as forms of moulding.

Staying with **demeanour**, Gatrell (2013) notes that conforming to bodily norms at work presents special challenges during pregnancy or when returning after maternity leave. Senior women she interviewed recounted hiding their pregnancy-related nausea and not pacing themselves at work despite being exhausted. Some disciplined their bodies in other ways, like scientist Cath. She breastfed her baby in the early morning and at night only, using formula milk in between. As such, Cath endured the discomfort of engorged breasts during working hours rather than expressing:

'So I just did this extraordinary thing that women do: where your body regulates itself and produces milk only when you need it and absolutely not during the working day ... At the beginning you have these two mounds that are so painful and so awful ... but in the end you can regulate; control it. You grit your teeth till your body just does it' (p. 636).

In Hunter and Kivinen's (2016) study of staff in girls' magazines offices, despite these workplaces being feminized, similar bodily silencings were practised – here around **clothing**. One pregnant editor was reluctant to attend an annual reader and advertiser event. In the end she went, but dressed to hide her bump on the advice of her colleagues. Like 'fat' female bodies, then, pregnant and maternal bodies are more visible in organizations, leading to efforts at gender dimming (Rydzik & Ellis-Vowles, 2019).

Relatedly, new mothers may be given 'private sphere' 'privileges' at work (Turner & Norwood, 2014) so they can **conceal themselves**, and specifically the expression of breastmilk, avoiding these sexualized body parts being visible and therefore 'troublesome' at work. Van Amsterdam (2015) and Gatrell (2019) discuss the spatiotemporal disjunctures around expression or nursing at work, where timetables and room allocation meet legal requirements but do not fully encompass new mothers' needs. These women have to navigate the shortfall, even though expression particularly is time consuming, complex and often

entails equipment. Van Amsterdam shows how accommodation makes extreme demands on maternal bodies so they remain hidden, including constant navigation of **clothing** to fit both workplace dress codes and expressing practicalities, and prevent stains on clothes which make the maternal body visible.

However, Gatrell (2013, 2019) emphasizes that women in low-paid and/or precarious work face the biggest challenges in expressing because they don't have their own offices or the autonomy to take breaks when they need to. Stumbitz and Jaga's (2020) interviews with low-income black women in South Africa indicate that they returned to work shortly after giving birth, since statutory maternity pay is low and difficult to secure. Consequently, they expressed and disposed of milk at work to cope with painful breasts because storing it for their babies was impractical; and did this using their own breaks rather than asking for the mandated two breaks a day for expressing or feeding. Like Cath in Gatrell's (2013) study, their bodies stopped producing milk at work after a while. Here, '[d]riven by economic necessity, these low-income mothers subordinated their physical and emotional relationship to their babies to the expectations of their work space' (Stumbitz & Jaga, 2020, p. 1496).

Elsewhere, women engage in explicitly masculine bodily performances around **demeanour, clothing and appearance** at work, especially in male-dominated occupations, to dim their female bodies. Woodfield's (2016, p. 247) female firefighters baulked at 'requesting support because of physical difference, often withstanding discomfort in order to avoid drawing attention to it; managing without complaint mixed-sex sleeping quarters and bathrooms ... and arguably thus risking optimal performance'. They also coped with uniforms or protective gear designed for male bodies. Likewise, Yarrow and Pagan's (2021, pp. 94–95) respondent Louise, a UK hospital doctor, commented on PPE being designed for 'the male "standard" body' so women often 'drowned' in masks and couldn't find gloves, aprons or gowns to fit them. This inappropriate equipment – even when it was available – put their lives at even more risk during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In another male-dominated occupation, Steidl and Brookshire's (2019) interviews with US soldiers establish that the military is a total institution so senior personnel are able to surveil their staff on and off duty. Consequently, female respondents described efforts to attain 'honorary masculinity' by standing and speaking in masculine ways, having short hair and tattoos, eschewing make up and jewellery, training hard to equal or beat their male colleagues in physical feats, working out how to make kit invented for male bodies suit their bodies and urinating outdoors when in the field. Moreover, they avoided going to the mess alone, because of the likelihood of sexualized leering

from men – reminding us of the **self-concealing** strategies reported in the MAW literature.

Similarly, Rydzik and Ellis-Vowles' (2019) study of women microbrewers found that they took pride in dressing very functionally for work – loose trousers, old t-shirts and heavy boots. But at other times these microbrewers mobilized their femininity, like flirting with male publicans to persuade them to sell their beers. They moved 'between *downplaying* and *foregrounding* gender to emphasize sameness [invisibility] as well as difference [visibility]' (p. 494). We see similar strategies in Bitbol-Saba and Dambrin's (2019) study of the gendered interactions between French female auditors and their clients in another male-dominated profession. These auditors sometimes amplified their femininity – for example, acting the role of the naïf or making themselves up more carefully and choosing shorter skirts for client meetings to seem less threatening and elicit information more easily.

Finally under moulding, Muhr (2011) argues that female leadership can be both excessively masculine in style and excessively feminine in physicality. A case study of one Scandinavian CEO – Lisa – demonstrates how her performance reinforces pervasive gender inequalities:

'While her leadership style itself is very masculine, her looks and appearance, as well as her status as a mother of four are all very feminine. It is as if her [...] masculine and feminine perfection intimidates [her staff] or, more precisely, that the combination of her extremely masculine behaviour and feminine appearance seems unnatural and uncanny ...' (pp. 347–348).

Here again then we see the use of **demeanour and appearance** as bodily moulding strategies.

## Medication and surgery

In the OMS literature on cis women's bodies at work, as in MAW scholarship, there are references to **medicating the body** as a moulding strategy to render it less visible. In one instance this overlaps with discussions of women's efforts to **manage bodily size**. When Joanne was a slimming consultant, she took weight loss pills and speed to maintain a lower dress size than her standard UK 16. This made her feel ill and very guilty. Joanne says her former employers

'should've discriminated against me. They could see I was big, 'curvy'. And they knew that they wanted a [size] 12 at [most]. The pep talks, the encouragement to become some-

thing you're not, at the time felt supportive, but it wasn't, was it, it was pressure to change' (Butler & Harris, 2015, p. 515).

In terms of reproductive stages, senior women may self-medicate to cope with painful periods or indeed menopausal symptoms, or even have Caesarean sections to fit childbirth around work demands (Bell & Sinclair, 2016; Gatrell et al., 2017; Sayers & Jones, 2015). Again, there is an overlap with women's attempts to conceal their reproductive capacity at work as well as references to **surgery** as part of bodily moulding, an example of which also appears in the next sub-section.

## Bodily amplification

Thus far we have mainly discussed bodily moulding at work using Rydzik and Ellis-Vowles's (2019) gender dimming, with some exceptions including their own microbrewers. In isolated instances, however, highly feminine, sexualized and visible bodily performances are part of the job description, as in Hales et al.'s (2021) discussion of lap dancers. Here again we see self-discipline around **bodily size and appearance**. Hales *et al.* suggest that customers' expectations, fuelled by club marketing, mean dancers need to be slim, curvaceous, tanned and fit in order to earn a living. Many also amplify their bodies via **surgical** breast enhancement or Botox. This study suggests that bodily regimes are not just reproduced at work, but also outside of work in order to make one's body fit for such regimes.

## Intersectionality

Finally, in some OMS studies, we see an intersection of characteristics in bodily moulding. In Glass and Cook (2020) and Rabelo et al. (2021), the intersection is between gender and ethnicity, whereas Jammaers and Williams' (2021) Belgian respondents self-identified as having a disability. These women reported that caring responsibilities for others – children, partners, elderly relatives – created additional pressure for them to engage in bodily **self-care** so they could undertake these obligations as well as paid work. There are also instances of bodily moulding which turn on gender and age. Jyrkinen and McKie (2012, p. 72) say their '[w]omen managers felt pressure to stay "always young" or "ageless"'. Among Bowman et al.'s (2017) Australian interviewees, 56 year old Kate, a social worker dyed her white hair – a form of **appearance-based** moulding – to dim her age for interviews. Jacinta, who is 46, employed **clothing** – specifically accessories – to draw

attention away from her older body, saying 'It's got to be some expensive type of bag ... I do have one of those just for interviews ... I even wear a different pair of earrings because ... they've got to be impressive in some way' (p. 474).

Staying with the intersection of gender and age, the young women interviewed by Tazzyman (2020) narrated how their **clothing** had changed since graduating from university. They now tried to embody a middle-class body that looked 'modest, not overtly sexual, hidden and discreet ... , feminine and "classy"' (p. 336), compromising by dressing for work in ways they personally disliked. As with Hales et al.'s (2021) lap dancers, this performance also extended beyond the working day so their bodies were maintained in order to always be 'fit' for work.

Table 1 summarizes the sub-themes in the MAW and OMS literatures around bodily moulding as accommodation to workplace norms. We see particular overlap between the two literatures with work on clothing, medication and surgery but also some on concealment and self-care. The use of 'kit' is specific to MAW research, as are managing size, demeanour and appearance to OMS.

Next we return to the MAW literature on our second theme, non?disclosure as a form of accommodation, before discussing the same focus in OMS.

## NON-DISCLOSURE IN THE MAW LITERATURE

This theme is more muted in what is a relatively small literature anyway. Jack et al. (2014) suggest gendered ageism in organizations, meaning mid-life women can feel devalued, overlooked and under pressure to put on appropriate bodily performances during menopause, often leads to non-disclosure of symptoms – even though they can make working life extremely challenging. The lowest levels of reporting are indexed in a National Union of Teachers (2014a, 2014b) survey of 3079 women members where fewer than 22% had reported their menopausal symptoms to line managers. Amongst those who did not, explanations included: worries it would raise **concerns about their performance; embarrassment**, especially if their manager was male and/ or younger; and **fear their confidentiality would not be respected**. Griffiths et al.'s (2006) survey of 941 UK women police officers saw just 33% disclosing their symptoms to managers; and in Atkinson et al.'s (2021a) survey of 1684 officers only 39% had told their line managers, again because of worries about having their **performance judged, the age and gender of their manager, privacy and embarrassment**. Some felt more open discussion of menopause at work was equally problematic, because '**people will think [older] women**

TABLE 1 How women mould their bodies to accommodate norms at work

	'Kit'	Clothing	Concealment	Self-care	Managing body size	Demeanour and appearance	Medication and surgery
MAW research	Putnam and Bochantin (2009); Butler (2020); Kittell et al. (1998)	Kittell et al. (1998); Atkinson et al. (2021a); Steffan (2021); Butler et al. (2020)	Jack et al. (2019); Steffan (2021)	Bodza et al. (2019)			Cumming et al. (2011); Daysal and Orsini (2014); Griffiths et al. (2013); SIRC (2002); Ariyoshi (2008, 2009)
OMS research		Glass and Cook (2020); Hunter and Kivinen (2016); Woodfield (2016); van Amsterdam (2015); Yarrow and Pagan (2021); Rydzik and Ellis-Vowles (2019); Bitbol-Saba and Dambrin (2019); Bowman et al. (2017)	van Amsterdam (2015); Steidl and Brookshire (2019)	Jammaers and Williams (2021)	van Amsterdam and van Eck (2019); Driver (2008); Glass and Cook (2020); Tazzyman (2020); Pouthier and Sondak (2021); Butler and Harris (2015); Hales et al. (2021)	Gatrell (2013, 2019); Stumbitz and Jaga (2020); Woodfield (2016); Steidl and Brookshire (2019); Rydzik and Ellis-Vowles (2019); Bitbol-Saba and Dambrin (2019); Muhr (2011); Bowman et al. (2017)	Butler and Harris (2015); Bell and Sinclair (2016); Gatrell et al. (2017); Sayers and Jones (2015); Hales et al. (2021)

... **are less able to do their work**, and a group apart' (respondent quotation, p. 670 – emphasis added).

In another UK survey, only a quarter of 896 respondents had disclosed (Griffiths et al., 2013). These data indicate that women often do not want to link their sickness absence to the menopause, **for fear of performance or capability queries**. Similarly, Putnam and Bochantin's (2009, p. 63) respondent 'BooBoolen' faked illness at work to hide her symptoms. Our survey (Beck et al., 2020) found higher levels of disclosure per se, at 45.8% of 3914 women, and some variation across employment sectors. However, only 23.9% had told a line manager. Of the 2121 women who had not disclosed, reasons given echo those found in other research around **privacy, concerns about negative perceptions or having their capacity questioned**. Finally, non-disclosure, as well as moulding, requires **stoicism and assuming personal responsibility**. In Steffan's (2021, 205) interview data, participants described menopause as 'a physical thing that you just have to get through'. Her respondents stressed that managing menopausal symptoms at work was something they alone could do.

In this section we have seen coherent, if limited, findings on non-disclosure of menopausal status at work, and managing symptoms oneself accordingly. These speak to deep-seated concerns women may have about opening up around the debilitating effects on their working bodies that menopause can create. Next we explore the even more limited non-disclosure motif in OMS research.

## NON-DISCLOSURE IN OMS LITERATURE

The three relevant studies in our OMS research include Yates et al. (2018) who discuss how their female police officers manage work-related stress by electing not to talk about it. This speaks to women's efforts to maintain bodily invisibility at work. Yates *et al.* use Leder's (1990) concept of gendered dys-appearance to pinpoint instances where the body makes itself known because of 'dysfunction or problematic operation' (Leder, cited in Yates *et al.* 2018, p. 91). When dys-appearance occurs, according to Leder, we are compelled to make it go away, so the body sinks back into our subconscious. Yates *et al.* argue that dys-appearance can be gendered because of what we foreground in this paper – the female body's construction as Other to the male norm, in workplaces especially. The masculinity of police work involves substantial self-control, heavy workloads, physical danger and extended, often unsocial working hours. Any disclosure that one is feeling stressed can have **negative career implications** and reinforce **gender stereotypes**. So Yates *et al.*'s respondents often dismissed physical stress symptoms like

injury flare ups, worked at or past their physical and mental limits and talked about how this enhanced their performance.

The second study indexing non-disclosure is one we have discussed already – Woodfield's (2016, p. 247) female firefighters and their refusal to seek workplace adjustments around uniform, bathrooms etcetera. Like Yates *et al.*'s police officers, these women work in a highly masculinist occupational sector, in which discursive pressure to conform to the ideal male worker body is even more pronounced. In both studies, we see **a desire not to draw any negative performance-related attention** and to **avoid stereotyping** on the basis of gender.

**Stoicism** appears in Gatrell's (2013) research with female managers and professionals about pregnancy and maternity at work, which was also discussed earlier. Gatrell quotes her respondent Annika, a communications professional, who disclosed neither her pregnancy nor her decision to have amniocentesis to colleagues. Annika discusses how 'awful' the test was, how she had to stay still for 'a day and a half afterwards' and the cramping she suffered. She took annual leave to cover her absence from work due to the test and recovery period, and comments further about the waiting period for the results:

'So I was trying to act normal you know, doing a great job, better than normal and looking good. You are expected to look good and I was really having to work at hiding the stress of waiting ... While all the time looking good, like cramming my feet into these high boots and performing to a top standard, when I felt like crap' (p. 634).

Annika here comments on the importance of **keeping up appearances** and circles us back to this bodily moulding strategy, combined with silence about her pregnancy and what it entailed. Again, we see a motif of sidestepping **potential concerns around performance**. Overall, and as with MAW research, we see women enduring demanding physical experiences which threaten to amplify their female bodies and drawing on their reserves of resilience to mask these at work.

Table 2 below summarizes the various reasons for non-disclosure as a form of Forbes' (2009) co-modification in both MAW research and OMS. Disclosure overall is more prominent in the MAW literature and could pinpoint areas in which OMS research is underdeveloped, in particular when it comes to embarrassment, managers' age and gender, confidentiality and privacy.

We now move to our third theme – failing at accommodation – and return to MAW scholarship.

TABLE 2 Why women do not disclose bodily challenges at work

	Career implications	Embarrassment	Age and gender of line manager	Confidentiality and privacy	Stoicism and individual responsibility	Avoiding gender stereotypes
MAW research	NUT (2014a, 2014b); Atkinson et al. (2021a); Putnam and Bochantin (2009); Beck et al. (2020)	NUT (2014a, 2014b); Atkinson et al. (2021a); Griffiths et al. (2013)	Atkinson et al. (2021a)	NUT (2014a, 2014b); Atkinson et al. (2021a); Griffiths et al. (2013)	Steffan (2021)	Atkinson et al. (2021a); Beck et al. (2020)
OMS research	Yates et al. (2019); Woodfield (2016); Gatrell (2013)				Gatrell (2013)	Yates et al. (2019); Woodfield (2016)

## FAILING AT ACCOMMODATION IN THE MAW LITERATURE

There is evidence of women's failure to accommodate corporeal organizational expectations here in claims that **negative reactions from others to requests for support** around menopausal symptoms are especially common in male-dominated workplaces. This is one variant of failure, in the same workplaces where non-disclosure is particularly likely. One of Jack et al.'s (2014, p. 19) university interviewees told this anecdote about her hot flushes:

'So I spoke to my manager director about that[,] saying, you know, it's really hot ... on really hot[,] hot days when even being down this [cooler] end [of the office] didn't work and I asked to work at home with my air conditioning[.] I got a really bad response, I wasn't allowed to do [it], I had to come in'.

Griffiths et al. (2006) and Atkinson et al. (2021a) make a similar point about such workplaces. However, the example the latter give is of **unavoidable failure** as opposed to disclosure as a form of failure. Atkinson *et al.* quote a female police officer who was on a long phone call to the Crown Prosecution Service and could not hang up 'because the custody clock was ticking'. She had menopause-related menstrual flooding during the call which soaked through her clothes on to her chair, and found this extremely embarrassing, especially since everyone else in the office was male (p. 666).

Failure to accommodate to organizational norms is, nonetheless, also apparent in findings from other sectors. A UK NUT (2014b) survey indexes other types of inadvertent failure, with some menopausal participants being **criticized and bullied** by their managers because of their symptoms and others saying they were unlikely to return to work after long term sick leave for similar reasons. These data also highlighted **performance monitoring and capability procedures** being instigated for women. The Trades Union Congress (TUC, 2014) point to union representatives' accounts of supporting colleagues through **disciplinary cases linked to absence or performance** due to menopause symptoms. Equally, survey data collected by Paul (2003) from trade union safety representatives indicate that 20% of women had been **treated badly by their managers** because of their symptoms. Such findings make it even more understandable that women seek to mould their bodies at and for work and/or stay silent about any difficulties they experience.

Reynolds (1999) and Morris and Symonds (2004), similarly, say menopausal hot flushes and heavy periods are

often inadvertently visible at work and may trigger mockery, whereas Atkinson et al. (2021a, p. 668 – emphasis added) index respondents' comments around being 'fair game to poke fun at' or 'made to feel like the naughty officer that was 'swinging the lead'. These are instances of biology resurging against socio-psychological efforts at symptom concealment as opposed to negative reactions on the basis of disclosure. We now turn to failure in the OMS literature.

## FAILING AT ACCOMMODATION IN THE OMS LITERATURE

As Simpson and Kumra (2016) suggest, and the section above illustrates, merit may not 'adhere' to female bodies if expected occupational identity and embodied social identity are misaligned. Women are more likely to be criticized either where they 'transgress' by, say, being 'overly assertive (/shrill)', 'too' emotional or when assumptions are made about them based on their bodies at work. This includes displaying legitimate anger and having colleagues attribute this to one's menstrual cycle (Haynes, 2012; Canham, 2014; Kapasi et al., 2016; Gatrell et al., 2017; Steidl & Brookshire, 2019) or, as Rabelo et al. (2021, p. 1842), suggest, being judged as angry or scary simply by virtue of being a black woman. But trying to 'fit in' can also backfire: '[a] woman in a suit might think that she is passing as one of the boys, but she cannot help becoming an eroticized figure' (Rippin, 2015, p. 119; also see van den Brink & Stobbe, 2009). In all of these instances, a woman's workplace behaviour is evaluated using **normative assumptions about her gendered (and racialized) body**.

Elsewhere, women reflect on how their pregnant bodies make them **problematically visible** at work. As one of Hennekam *et al.*'s Dutch respondents puts it, 'I felt like a stranger, out of place as if my huge body did not fit here. Pregnancy is a natural process, but it seems unnatural in a work environment where your body is not supposed to be' (2019, p. 924). Finally, sexuality and gender is the focus of Einarisdóttir *et al.*'s (2016) interviews with LGBT respondents about their bodies. Lesbian participants described coming out at work and not being believed because **others saw them (/ their bodies) as too feminine**. Failure to work towards or achieve the ideal organizational body can therefore expose women to workplace hyper-visibility and mistreatment (Levay, 2014; Roehling *et al.*, 2007).

In the MAW literature, we therefore see failure to accommodate to bodily norms at work, to dim the cis female body, met with refusal of support, critique, bullying, performance management, disciplinary action and mockery. The OMS research on women's bodies also indexes critique alongside stereotyping and becoming hyper-visible, which

are not dealt with in its sister oeuvre. But OMS does not include discussion of having requests for support rejected, allegations of poor performance or being harassed and bullied. We draw these various strands together in Table 3.

Now we explore the flip-side of Forbes' (2009) co-modification – resistance to, and reclamation and redefinition of, idealized versions of worker embodiment. We start with MAW scholarship.

## RESISTANCE, RECLAMATION AND REDEFINITION IN THE MAW LITERATURE

Evidence here is sparse again, although resistance is occasionally apparent. Certain posts in the Putnam and Bochantin (2009) study demonstrate **open non-compliance**, like one woman describing how her female manager recommended she wore a blazer to conceal her hot flush related sweat stains. She responded that she would do this as soon as she received a rise to allow her to buy new clothes. The manager later recommended her for a \$4800 pay increase (p. 65). Butler's (2020, p. 703) interviewees **resisted more subtly** against workplace restrictions because they worried about smelling bad due to hot flush-related sweat. This included damaging hinges so doors stayed open for better ventilation. Anna also described having a severe hot flush in her manager's office and realizing this made him hugely uncomfortable (p. 705–706). Afterwards she and her friends made use of this when the manager was annoying them by pretending they were having a flush.

Turning to **reclamation**, working women can **interpret and experience menopause much more positively**, contrary to the biomedical discourse that it is a form of decline or ending. Half of SIRC's (2002) respondents felt they were now more able to develop their careers, and 75% said their quality of working life had either not changed or had improved once they reached menopause. Elsewhere Kafanelis *et al.* (2009) suggest some of their interviewees felt more self-aware, which translated into increased assertiveness at work. Atkinson *et al.*'s (2021a) police respondents also reported beneficial workplace aspects to menopause, including 'maturity, wisdom and greater self-assurance' (p. 668). Other evidence of reclamation of the post-reproductive working body includes what Bochantin (2014) describes as embracing menopausal identity. For example, one of the posts she analysed reads 'At my job, we celebrate our menopausalness!! A group of women on my floor have affectionately begun referring to ourselves as the 'mensi-mob!'. Even the men join in and find this humorous. Look out America, here come the mensi-mob!!' (wolfjan4129, p. 272).

**TABLE 3** How women fail to accommodate bodily norms at work

Request for support backfires	Body inadvertently or problematically visible	Seen as under-performing	Being harassed, bullied and made fun of	Body and thus behaviour are stereotyped
MAW research Jack et al. (2014)	Atkinson et al. (2021a); Reynolds (1999); Morris and Symonds (2004); NUT (2014b)	TUC (2014); NUT (2014b)	NUT (2014b); Paul (2003); Reynolds (1999); Morris and Symonds (2004); Atkinson et al. (2021a)	
OMS research	Hennekam et al. (2019)			Haynes (2012); Canham (2014); Kapasi et al. (2016); Gatrell et al. (2017); Steidl and Brookshire (2019); Rabelo et al. (2021); Rippin (2009); van den Brink and Stobbe (2009)

But the most sustained evidence of these reclamations comes from Jack et al.'s (2019) and Butler's (2020) studies. In Jack *et al.*, 'working through' menopausal changes allowed several respondents to develop better self-knowledge, more resourcefulness and creativity and to become more attuned to their biorhythms at work. Others suggested perimenopause had freed them from the sexualized, subservient selves they felt enjoined to perform earlier in their careers. As Diana explains, 'It's a sense of I can't be fucked pleasing people any more. I'm too tired. I don't have the energy and I really, I just want to focus on the important things and that feels liberating too' (p. 137). These women also talked openly about menopause at work to smooth the path for their younger colleagues. Butler's (2020, p. 702, p. 705) participants described looking to each other for support, so menopause became 'a strong bonding experience'. Their communal ties 'made them harder, physically, and more able to cope 'mentally with whatever ageing throws at us'.

Finally, on **redefinition**, some responses on Putnam and Bochantin's (2009) message board recommended the issues raised were **re-interpreted as organizational, not personal**, thus reframing menopause at work:

'Kollete12: Have you ever been embarrassed at work? ... A male co[-]worker actually told me that my sweat stains were unsightly and that if I wanted to uphold a professional appearance, I might think about not wearing silk blouses ... I should excuse myself to the ladies' room to "fix" myself up.

Gee Gee: What you have been experiencing at work is discrimination. You need to go to HR at your work and talk with someone about this. If it were me, I would tell the higher-ups

about his behavior. Explain that you deserve respect from all employees' (p. 66).

The next section focuses on the same theme in OMS research.

## RESISTANCE, REDEFINITION AND RECLAMATION IN THE OMS LITERATURE

As with MAW scholarship, this theme is not very prevalent. Nonetheless, research we reviewed indexes some ways in which women refuse to conform to corporeal organizational expectations. Resistance can centre on a specific aspect of embodiment. Van Amsterdam and van Eck's (2019) study of self-identified fat women provides evidence of **overt resistance** to somatic norms at work – like deliberately standing out by wearing bright clothes, or making jokes about being fat.

Elsewhere resistance is related to organizational position. McKie and Jyrkinen (2017, p. 102) report female managers in Finland pushing back against inappropriate comments on their bodies at work, including adopting a deliberately asexual 'female manager business look' – although this could also be read as an instance of accommodation via bodily moulding – and 'polite but sharp or humorous responses'. Gatrell (2013), as suggested earlier, concentrates on how women in similar roles navigate pregnancy and new motherhood at work. Five of her respondents had found 'ways of revising their own position at work in a manner which enabled them to remain less isolated from sites of influence and decision making' (p. 637). One woman held meetings at home during her maternity leave whereas another openly breastfed her baby during meetings. Again we read these strategies,

whereby women amplify their bodies at work contrary to organizational norms, as **explicit resistance**.

Resistance by senior women can also speak back to racialized discourses of appropriate organizational embodiment. Canham's (2014) South African manager respondents Nomonde and Lerato were both openly incredulous when told they needed to be less upfront at work by their mentors. Likewise, Forbes' (2009) research surfaces instances where her black female professionals pushed back against sexual degradation and objectification, like Tai's reply to her manager's constant propositions: 'My strategy [...] was to tell him we could have sex after he told his live-in lover that I was moving in' (p. 603).

In terms of **redefinition**, Haynes (2012) offers the intriguing insight that her female accountants and lawyers demonstrated their grasp of Bourdieu's 'illusio' – appearing to believe in 'the game', to uphold workplace bodily norms which they would otherwise resist but in full knowledge of the sacrifices this entailed on their part. Here, what may appear to be accommodation could actually be **more detached, reflexive and nuanced**.

In a very different occupation, Just and Muhr's (2020) Danish pole dance instructors were keen **to reclaim the idea that their work further objectified them as sexualized targets of the male gaze**. They emphasized how the job empowered women 'by teaching them to (re-)claim, be proud of and engage in an active female sexuality' (p. 7). They embraced the 'sexual taint' of pole dancing but suggested that dancers 'can move from being objects of someone else's desire to being desiring subjects themselves' (p. 18). These workers also: defined pole dancing as art and necessitating strength, emotion and athleticism; did not dance in stilettos; avoided hiring other instructors who danced very sexily; or rearticulated sexy pole dancing as wilder and more liberating than the stereotype.

In the MAW literature, then, we see resistance in women pushing back against expectations of their working bodies. Others reclaimed menopause as a positive experience at work and embraced their menopausal identity. Redefinition appears in reframing difficulties caused by symptoms at work as discrimination. In the OMS research, resistance involves pushing back again but also: deliberately standing out in a bodily sense; efforts to redirect attention away from cis female bodies; and conscious amplification of those bodies. Redefinition turns up as an instance of pretending to be committed to the organizational 'game' whereas we see reclamation in an occupation usually considered to be highly sexualized. Depersonalization as redefinition only appears in the MAW literature, whereas detachment as redefinition is visible in OMS work alone.

We synthesize these findings in Table 4.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

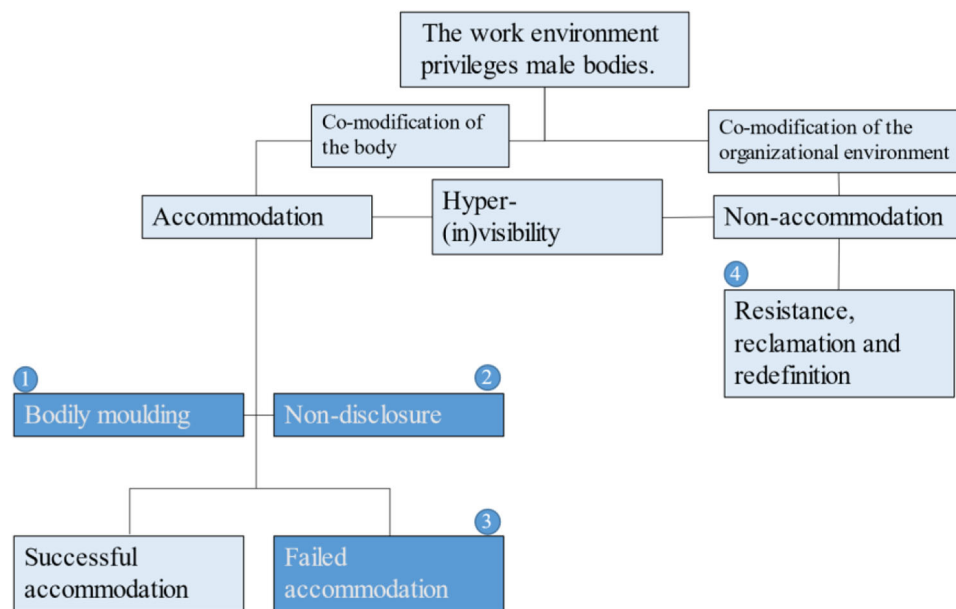
Our review of the MAW literature and OMS research on cis women's bodies was inspired by the well-established argument around the privileging of cis male bodies in organizational discourse, culture and practice. This makes 'it difficult for women to 'fit in' because their bodies are marked as lacking certain embodied professional characteristics such as masculine rationality, and/or as excessive, for example too sexy or leaky' (Adamson & Johansson, 2016, p. 2204). Working cis women therefore often adopt accommodation strategies to dim their gender (Rydzik & Ellis-Vowles, 2019), although those in some service occupations can be adjured to magnify their femininity. We used Forbes' (2009) concept of co-modification to argue that these strategies show up in women moulding their bodies at or for work and not disclosing bodily challenges, as well as being evident in failure to accommodate to gendered corporeal norms in the workplace. But women also resist, reclaim or redefine these norms. Evidence comes from experiences of reproductive stages like pregnancy, maternity and menopause, as well as how women manage their size, dress and make up, discipline, carry, medicate, have surgery on and avoid talking about their bodies, at and for work. As Tables 1–4 illustrate, these themes are unevenly distributed across the relevant scholarship.

It is also worth emphasising that Forbes (2009) does not break her discussion of co-modification as accommodation down into specifics, instead focusing more generally on how her respondents 'internalize and reproduce the dominant social discourse about Black women's bodies' (2009, p. 604). In expanding on her work, we identify three accommodation strategies that cis women undertake at or for work, induced from our review of MAW and OMS literature. Our use of Forbes' framework also expands her original arguments in: 1. its application to a wide range of MAW and OMS empirical research; 2. widening the analytical lens beyond black women's bodies and beyond their sexualization, which Forbes calls commodification; and 3. adding the theme of failed accommodation, which she does not discuss. Figure 2 therefore outlines our expansion of Forbes' co-modification concept to illustrate how women (attempt to) self-discipline – or not – in response to the discursive preference for male bodies in the workplace. Light blue squares denote borrowings from the original, whereas darker squares denote our contributions to the concept.

We also suggest that our identification of sub-strategies within moulding, non-disclosure, failure and resistance, redefinition and reclamation represents a contribution since it constitutes an inductive surfacing and grouping

**TABLE 4** How women resist, redefine or reclaim bodily norms at work

	Overt resistance	More subtle resistance	Depersonalizing as redefinition	Detaching as redefinition	Reclamation of bodily experience as positive
MAW research	Putnam and Bochantin (2009)	Butler (2020)	Putnam and Bochantin (2009)		SIRC (2002); Kafanelis et al. (2009); Bochantin (2014); Atkinson et al. (2021a); Jack et al. (2019); Butler (2020)
OMS research	Van Amsterdam and van Eck (2019); McKie and Jyrkinen (2017); Gatrell (2013); Canham (2014); Forbes (2009)	McKie and Jyrkinen (2017)		Haynes (2012)	Just and Muhr (2020)

**FIGURE 2** Expanding Forbes' co-modification concept [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jmr.12318)]

together of a wide variety of co-modification tactics across a large corpus of research.

In reading the MAW and OMS literatures side by side, we wanted to answer two research questions, as elucidated in our introduction. The main body of this paper has demonstrated what each tells us about conceptual and blind spots in the other. On this basis, we now address the 'why does this matter?' element of our research questions and suggest new ways forward both for MAW scholarship and OMS research on women's bodies accordingly.

## Menopausal bodies as doubly out of place at work

In considering our first research question, the OMS literature establishes that pregnant and maternal bodies are constructed as 'out of place' or 'boundary creatures' (van

Amsterdam, 2015; Gatrell, 2019; Hennekam et al., 2019) in organizations because of their reproductive capacities and concomitant changes in size, production of bodily fluids like vomit, breastmilk and so on. The social order in the global north continues to place great store by the ability to both produce and reproduce, and is structured accordingly. As Pugh points out,

'Mothers live at the convergence of these social messages: (1) that the successful worker is the unfettered, totally committed, ideal (and thus gendered male) worker [...]; (2) that the work world is more valued and valuable than the domestic sphere; and (3) that the best mothering is hands on, intensive, all consuming, and altruistic' (cited in Maher et al., 2019, p. 878 – also see Gatrell, 2019; Steffan, 2021, p. 199).

The menopausal body, like the pregnant or maternal body, is out of kilter with the ideal (male) worker body because – amongst other things – it leaks menstrual blood erratically, is prone to emotional fluctuations and heats up at variable intervals. *But it cannot reproduce either*. As Butler (2020, p. 700 – also see Jack et al., 2019, p. 126) suggests, the menopausal working body is abject: it is ‘degenerating and diminishing, losing vigour and ageing in full sight, which in an increasingly aesthetic, youth-obsessed workplace ... is embarrassingly misaligned’. So, as our sub-title suggests, it is doubly ‘out of place’ in organizations: its abject status is amplified. Equally, unlike pregnancy and motherhood, almost every cis woman will attain menopause. And the ideal bodily performance at work may be rendered even harder for mid-life women because of a vicious circle where menopause symptoms make work more challenging and work makes symptoms more challenging, as in Jack et al.’s (2014) example where office temperature rendered one woman’s hot flushes almost impossible to work through.

As such, OMS should make room for more research which explores the heightened abjection to which menopausal bodies might be subjected at work. This could usefully explore the various accommodation strategies women deploy to mask their boundary status in extending what MAW scholarship has to say about the use of workplace ‘kit’, clothing, concealment, appearance and medication in this regard. It can also contribute by attending to moulding strategies undertaken by menopausal women which MAW literature overlooks, like managing bodily size.

## Enforced visibility at work

Relatedly, menopause can enforce unwanted visibility so women find it particularly challenging to do well at work because their bodies sometimes ‘burst through’ despite attempts at dimming them. We have seen this in the relevant scholarship in references to blood staining clothing and hot flushes, as well as the unsympathetic reactions such bursting through can trigger. As we suggested earlier, it is unsurprising that women go to such lengths to mould their menopausal bodies at and for work, given what might happen if they fail in their accommodation efforts. Enforced visibility therefore affects women’s bodies from the onset of the menarche until several years post-menopause. When we consider that hot flushes, which may be visible to others in skin reddening or excessive sweating, are experienced by 75% of post-menopausal women (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2015, p. 73), this is probably also a more common work-

place experience than, say, pregnancy-related nausea or breastmilk staining clothes.

This adds another dimension to the visibility paradox in which women attempt to remain invisible in a male-dominated world yet have to be more visible and perform better than men to advance in their careers. Indeed, as Atkinson et al. (2021a) point out, there is concern amongst working women that bringing menopause to the fore might produce yet another metaphorical stick with which their colleagues and managers can beat them. Mid-life women’s experiences of feeling disregarded or unsupported – hence invisible – at work are similarly important (Jack et al., 2019). Taken together, we propose that the visibility paradox in fact is four-fold for menopausal workers – they try to blend into masculinist organizational spaces, but need to excel in order to move onwards and upwards, whilst possibly feeling neglected and overlooked and also always at risk of enforced visibility due to unpredictable symptoms. There are some intriguing trajectories here which OMS research could add to its purview to expand conceptualizations of this paradox.

## Formal repercussions

Relatedly, the MAW literature identifies sanctions for mid-life women’s supposed under-performance. This draws attention to performance monitoring and capability procedures based on cis female bodies and begs reflection on the design of post-absence reviews. There is very little on these issues in OMS research on women’s bodies per se. Canham’s (2014) research into black female managers in South Africa is one exception, where Lulu, a former division head at the bank, had been forced out of the organization as a result of being portrayed as ‘a black shrew, matriarch, witch, bitch ... , or feminist killjoy’ (p. 163) by her white, male counterparts. Nonetheless, Canham makes no mention of formal repercussions, whereas we do see these in MAW research. Equally, the post-reproductive body is arguably more at risk in this regard.

## Co-modifying the female body

Turning to our second research question as to what OMS can teach us about the MAW literature, we have identified more accommodation strategies in terms of moulding the cis female body in the OMS literature than in MAW scholarship. These present additional pathways for empirical exploration in the latter, including how one holds oneself and interacts with others to draw attention away from problematic menopause symptoms, as well as managing bodily size as mentioned above.

## Co-modifying the workplace

There is little evidence in the MAW literature about how women resist, reclaim or redefine organizational expectations of their post-reproductive bodies. Such behaviours are not writ large across the OMS research but they are even less present in its sister scholarship. As Jack et al. (2019, p. 137) point out, 'The sentiment of going unscripted was often part of a broader story of the menopausal body, in the sense that the ambiguity of menopause provided an experiential site for the unknown'. While this 'unscriptedness' could create difficulties highlighted by the MAW literature, it also offers opportunities for rethinking and subverting these expectations. A small number of these have been documented in MAW scholarship but there is space for much more exploration.

## Intersectionality

Finally, MAW scholarship overlooks questions of intersectionality other than the criss-crossing of gender and age. We have dealt with this lacuna in some depth in another paper (Atkinson et al., 2021b) and so will not unpack it here, save to emphasize the considerable potential for exploration of how gender, age and disability, for example, or gender, age and ethnicity interact in women's experiences of menopause at work.

We therefore propose the following research agenda for OMS and MAW researchers, ideally in collaboration with each other:

- A widening of existing OMS scholarship on the specific challenges faced by menopausal women at work around the potentially toxic combination of perceptions of declining productivity and declining reproductivity.
- Attention in OMS to the four-fold visibility paradox which faces menopausal women in organizations.
- More OMS focus on the formal sanctions which cis women experience at work for breaches of normative corporeal expectations, during menopause but also more generally.
- MAW scholars to take a cue from OMS in attending to the range of accommodation strategies which menopausal women employ in organizations.
- More attention in MAW literature to menopausal women's resistance, redefinition and reclamation of corporeal norms at work – or what we described earlier as co-modification of the organizational environment.
- MAW research to take intersectionality seriously in terms of menopausal women's experience of work, beyond the criss-crossing of gender and age.

In addition, and as Stumbitz and Jaga (2020) point out with regard to OMS on cis women's bodies at work but which also applies to MAW research, both are dominated by scholarship done in and about the global north. There is an urgent need to acknowledge, as they put it, 'the effects of space and location on the embodiment of gender' (p. 1486).

Our arguments here have certain limitations. We are constrained by the parameters of our literature searches, and cannot be sure that we have identified everything across MAW and OMS scholarship in the date ranges we set. And, as suggested already, we only deal with research on cis women's bodies in OMS, whereas the challenges around corporeal norms facing transgender and other gender diverse workers are certainly more substantial. We have, further, only concentrated on how cis women are enjoined to respond to these norms, and therefore arguably omitted a variety of other ways in which OMS and MAW researchers can learn from each other's work.

Nonetheless, we contend that these literatures have a great deal to offer each other in terms of new angles for empirical and conceptual exploration. Expanding the project of understanding women's bodies at work in these ways will, we argue, allow us to further challenge the underlying bodily norms which privilege 'a singular, hegemonic, masculine professional ideal' (Adamson & Johansson, 2016, p. 2205).

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>OMS also neglects menstruation, which lacuna space does not permit us to explore further.

<sup>2</sup>Most countries in the global north have legislation in place which prohibits workplace discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, disability and age, such as the UK's Equality Act 2010.

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