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Gay male academics in UK business and management schools: negotiating heteronormativities in everyday work life

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Abstract

This paper contributes to a neglected topic area about lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people's employment experiences in UK business and management schools. Drawing on queer theory to problematize essentialist notions of sexuality, we explore how gay male academics negotiate and challenge discourses of heteronormativity within different work contexts. Using in-depth interview data, the paper shows that gay male academics are continually constrained by heteronormativity in constructing viable subject positions as 'normal', often having to reproduce heteronormative values that squeeze opportunities for generating non-heteronormative 'queer' sexualities, identities and selves. Constructing a presence as an openly gay academic can invoke another binary through which identities are (re)constructed: as either 'gay' (a cleaned up version of gay male sexuality that sustains a heteronormative moral order) or 'queer' (cast as radical, disruptive and sexually promiscuous). Data also reveal how gay men challenge organizational heteronormativities through teaching and research activities, producing reverse discourses and creating alternative knowledge/power regimes, despite institutional barriers and risks of perpetuating heteronormative binaries and constructs. Study findings call for pedagogical and research practices that 'queer' (rupture, destabilize, disrupt) management knowledge and the heterosexual/homosexual binary, enabling non-heteronormative voices, perspectives, identities and ways of relating to emerge in queer(er) business and management schools.

Introduction

In this paper we examine the relationship between sexuality and heteronormativity in the context of UK business and management schools, with a particular focus on how gay male academics negotiate and challenge the heteronormativities present in organizational life. There are several reasons why our study is apposite. First, the work experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) academics in business and management schools are barely documented. Yet emergent research has underscored the salience of sexuality in and around business and management schools as a serious topic for study (Ford and Harding, 2008; Fotaki, 2011, 2013; Sinclair, 1995, 2000, 2005), with some commentators noting the necessity of future research on how the heteronormative dynamics of these institutions are experienced by LGBT people (Fotaki, 2011). Second, a parallel literature reveals that LGBT academics from different disciplines experience employment discrimination and persecution on the grounds of sexual orientation from students and colleagues in a variety of settings including lecture halls, classrooms and corridors, and in organizational procedures such as internal promotion (Pugh, 1998; Skelton, 1999; Valentine, Wood and Plummer, 2009). Studies have also shown how LGBT research has been devalued by some universities as insubstantial, with academics actively discouraged from undertaking scholarship in this area, while those who do report truncated career trajectories (LaSala et al., 2008; Taylor and

Raeburn, 1995). Notably, business and management schools rarely feature in this strand of literature. When taken together, this body of writing gives us reason to be gravely concerned by the dearth of research on how heteronormativities influence the work lives of LGBT employees in business and management schools.

If this knowledge gap is not addressed, one harmful effect is that the heteronormative bias within the literature on business and management schools remains unchallenged, reproducing a heterosexual/homosexual binary that posits heterosexuality as a normative standard by which other sexualities are judged and found wanting or excluded and silenced altogether (Warner, 1999). As Berlant and Warner (1998, p. 548) assert, heteronormativity maintains damaging binaries within 'institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality not only coherent – that is, organized as a sexuality – but also privileged'. Assumptions of heterosexuality as natural and privileged obscure the fact that LGBT people are an important constituency of business and management schools who must negotiate the norms, values and practices of knowledge coded in heteronormativity. Here, then, we risk becoming blind to the causes and effects of inequalities grounded in organizational heteronormativities and how they impact on LGBT work lives in specific contexts. Under these circumstances, individuals and organizations alike are neither engaged nor challenged by the issues raised by LGBT people in academic institutions, which we argue will stymy the capacity of those individuals targeted by and charged within business and management schools in bringing certain marginalized groups of people forward from the fringes. As we maintain, part of this enterprise must surely involve addressing organizational heteronormativities if we are to take seriously the needs, interests and voices of LGBT people who are employed within these institutions.

In this paper we select gay men as one of many possible examples (e.g. lesbian, bisexual, transindividuals) to explore how heteronormativities are manifest and negotiated within business and management academic work contexts. We do so partly motivated by our own experiences of negotiating heteronormativity in the workplace as openly gay men, accumulated over time within different UK business schools. However, we do not presume that these experiences are shared by other gay men. As Eribon (2004) argues, male homosexuality has been so heavily associated with sexual abnormality (e.g. promiscuity, links to paedophilia) that it constitutes a threat to the moral order and stability of heteronormativity in a way that some individuals who are also Othered (e.g. an older, heterosexual single woman) may not. Additionally, while gay male sexuality evokes shame and disgust (Halperin, 2012), hypersexualized heterosexual men are often venerated as sexually powerful (e.g. 'studs'). Clearly, this has a bearing on how gay men may self-identify at work. As such, we wish to examine how gay men variously position themselves and are positioned discursively by others in order to navigate a way through the heteronormativity of work life. In so doing, the conceptual aim of this paper is to use queer theory to expose how heteronormativities are manifest in academic work contexts, examining how they are negotiated and challenged by gay men. The paper draws on and reviews various strands of literature that provide an understanding of the heteronormativities facing gay men in business and management schools. Next, we outline this study's methodology before presenting and analysing our findings thematically. We conclude by discussing the contributions and implications of our research for gay men and the business and management schools in which they are employed.

Heteronormativity and UK business and management schools

We draw on the sexuality in organization literature to assert that organization and work contexts are important sites wherein heterosexuality is reproduced as privileged and 'natural' and, thus, established as normative (Hearn et al., 1989; Skidmore, 2004). This may be through policies that favour heterosexual family arrangements, cultural norms that construct LGBT sexualities as the Other and personal interactions that stigmatize LGBT sexualities (Hearn and Parkin, 1987; Humphrey, 1999; Priola et al., 2013). Indeed, over three decades of organizational research on LGBT sexualities demonstrates how LGBT employees engage in an ongoing process of negotiating heteronormativity at work, confronted by multifarious forms of employment discrimination and persecution that have led to harmful outcomes such as job loss, low self-esteem, physical and emotional injury (Giuffre, Dellinger and Williams, 2008; Law et al., 2011; Levine, 1979; Ozturk, 2011; Ward and Winstanley, 2003; Woods and Lucas, 1993). LGBT employees continually negotiate disclosure (Ward and Winstanley, 2005) and adopt strategies to manage their sexual identity at work (Clair, Beatty and MacLean, 2005; Woods and Lucas, 1993), contingent on an array of shifting personal, cultural and institutional factors (Ragins, 2008; Rumens and Broomfield, 2012). Such issues also resonate deeply with LGBT people employed in higher education generally (Skelton, 1999; Taylor, 2013; Valentine, Wood and Plummer, 2009) and within business and management schools in particular (Giddings and Pringle, 2011; McQuarrie, 1998).

Business and management schools have come under academic scrutiny as sites of sexual and gender inequality (Fotaki, 2011, 2013; Giddings and Pringle, 2011; Sinclair, 2005). Research has exposed the gendered nature of employment in these institutions, showing women's experience of discrimination through differences in, for example, how female and male bodies are discursively constructed (Fotaki, 2011; Sinclair, 2005), how women are discursively positioned as Other at management conferences (Ford and Harding, 2008), and academic career paths that are gendered according to a heteronormative male construct of academic success: research-active, participating in the Research Excellence Framework,[1] networking and sustaining an uninterrupted career history (Haynes and Fearfull, 2008). In the

UK context, government policy and practice fuelled by a neoliberal agenda of marketization and commodification of academic knowledge production, deployed through the reform of public service provision via New Public Management (NPM) discourse, contributed to a deeper entrenchment of gendered and sexual inequalities (Clark, Chandler and Barry, 1999; Currie, Harris and Thiele, 2000; Harris, Thiele and Currie, 1998). While some women have actively challenged new managerialist processes (Thomas and Davies, 2002) and have in some cases benefitted from greater emphasis on management in academic life (Deem, 2003), the cumulative effect of NPM has been to intensify longstanding gender and sexual imbalances in UK academia through a culture of audit, control, target setting and performance review (Chandler, Barry and Clark, 2002). LGBT initiatives in some public sector organizations have similarly been thwarted, even regressed, as a result of aggressive neoliberal impulses of the modernization agenda (Colgan and Wright, 2011).

Literature on LGBT sexual inequalities in business and management schools is scant, but wider scholarship on sexual inequalities within these institutions draws similar parallels to studies on gender. Mobilizing psychoanalytical poststructuralist feminist theories, Fotaki (2011, pp. 51–52) argues that women's subordination results from the 'management of desire (for knowledge) across normatively and (heteronormatively) established (embodied) and gendered lines' which privilege men and heterosexual constructs of masculinity. Although this study does not address LGBT academics, it prises open a space to contest and potentially change what Fotaki (2011) dubs as 'phallicized' academic work contexts. Giddings and Pringle (2011, p. 97) auto-ethnographically analyse the heteronormative contours of the work environment within one business school. For instance, when Giddings probes Pringle's thoughts on work attire, Pringle writes: 'Some lesbian women may feel comfortable with the masculine forms of dress implicit in a "professional" code. Within a business school where masculine dress is the norm . . . get a navy jacket, it's an essential item for the upwardly mobile academic, lesbian or not'. The 'successful' female business school academic is discursively fashioned in a way that subordinates personal preferences about how to embody a 'lesbian' identity at work. Of course, heterosexual women may find a 'navy jacket' equally uncomfortable or undesirable work attire, but for LGBT academics this may constrain valuable opportunities for using dress to identify as such, especially as clothing has long been an important means by which LGBT individuals can signify their sexuality to others in and outside work (Skidmore, 1999). Furthermore, we glimpse here the normative pressure brought to bear on subjects to 'fit in', which for LGBT people might also involve altering behaviour and values in ways that align with heteronormativity in order to achieve visibility as 'out' academics. Research shows that, for some gay and lesbian employees, embracing normative heterosexual values is the only way to construct a 'normal' sense of self (i.e. so they are 'just like' heterosexuals) within heteronormative work contexts (Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009; Williams, Giuffre and Dellinger, 2009). But in adopting this type of normalizing identity strategy, they must drive out any sense of 'queerness' about themselves that suggests promiscuity, political radicalism and subversiveness (Knopp, 1999; Rofes, 2005). Indeed, examining the consequences for LGBT people employed in higher education in the UK and the USA, Morrish and O'Mara (2011, p. 987) argue that many institutions 'prefer the invisibility of queers, lest they bring universities and colleges into disrepute'.

Nonetheless, there have been wider efforts within UK higher education institutions to address sexual orientation at work. In the UK, the introduction of protective legislation such as the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2003) and the Equality Act (2010) combined with seemingly more relaxed social attitudes towards LGBT people (Weeks, 2007) has complemented an existing 'business case' discourse for advancing sexual orientation equality at work (Colgan et al., 2007). Noteworthy then is that only six universities feature in the 2013 'Workforce Equality Index', an 'annual guide to Britain's most gay-friendly employers' produced by LGB charity Stonewall (www.Stonewall.org.uk). Although 73 universities appear on the 'Diversity Champions' programme as members 'committed to working with Stonewall to improve their workplaces for their lesbian, gay and bisexual staff' (www.Stonewall.org.uk), detail is not forthcoming about how different faculties and departments within each university might vary in their engagement with LGBT people and issues. As such, it is unwise to prejudge what exactly 'gay-friendly' badges signify at ground level in so far as LGBT students and staff members' daily lives are concerned. This cautionary note is borne out by the Equality Challenge Unit report which investigated the experiences of 720 LGBT staff in 134 UK higher education institutions, finding evidence of 'systematic institutional discrimination and implicit discrimination in relation to promotions, discretionary pay rises and redundancies', with LGBT staff having been routinely exposed to 'negative treatment' from 'colleagues (33.8%), students (18.9%), and those who work in other areas of their HEI [higher education institutions] (25.3%)' (Valentine, Wood and Plummer, 2009, p. 2). Thus a theoretical frame is needed that allows us to expose and contest organizational heteronormativity in academia, outlined below.

Queer theory

Growing out of poststructuralism, feminism, and gay and lesbian studies, queer theory is a diverse body of conceptual resources favoured by those for whom the heteronormativity of everyday life is problematic in how it constrains, through sexual and gender binaries, the possibilities for subjects to build meaningful identities and selves (Bersani, 1995; Halberstam, 2011; Halley and Parker, 2011; Halperin, 1995, 2012; Sedgwick, 1990; Warner, 1993). Queer theory informs the theoretical framing of this study in the following ways.

First, sexuality like gender is viewed as a category of knowledge that is historically conditioned and culturally contingent, rejecting essentialist accounts of sexuality as a fixed and 'natural' property of the individual. Queer theorists have often relied upon poststructuralist theories, such as those derived from Foucault's volumes on The History of Sexuality (1979, 1986, 1992), to advance the view that sexuality is not natural but is produced by discourse, a linguistic medium through which power and norms operate, to classify sexuality in contextually contingent ways. Foucault expresses it thus: 'in the nineteenth century the homosexual becomes a personage, a past . . .' (1979, p. 43). The discursive construction of the homosexual is bound up with the emergence of distinct sexual categories of knowledge (e.g. heterosexual/homosexual), a point which Ahmed (2006, p. 69) takes up in developing a queer phenomenology, noting that the emergence of the term 'sexual orientation' coincides with the 'production of "the homosexual" as a type of person who "deviates" from what is neutral [i.e. heterosexuality]'. Queer theorists such as Sedgwick, in Epistemology of the Closet (1990), and Bersani, in Homos (1995), have articulated the implications of this phenomenon. Bersani submits that it is through the 'classification, distribution, and moral rating of those sexualities the individuals practicing them can be approved, treated, marginalized, sequestered, disciplined, or normalized' (1995, p. 81). Indeed, Foucault's insistence on writing the history of sexuality 'from the viewpoint of discourses' (1979, p. 69) has helped queer theorists to denaturalize and politicize sexuality (Halperin, 1995). This created possibilities for upending humanist ontologies that constitute sexuality as a fixed and naturally occurring state. Judith Butler's writing (1990, 1993, 2004), partly indebted to Foucault's ideas, is oft-cited for conceptualizing sexuality and gender as the performative effects of reiterative acts within a heteronormative frame, which over time 'produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being' (1990, p. 33). We subscribe to this perspective since it allows us to understand how, through acts of repetition and recitation, sexuality like gender becomes ritualized, the effects of which make it appear 'natural'.

Second, queer theory's central analytical aim is the deconstruction of categories of knowledge and identities that are taken for granted, considered natural and beyond contestation. Here queer theory is less a device for explaining how LGBT people are repressed, although this is crucially important, and more an analysis of the heterosexual/homosexual binary as a power/ knowledge regime that shapes and orders everyday life (Seidman, 1996). As such, queer theories are animated by a deconstructive impulse (Stein and Plummer, 1994) to expose heteronormativity as a structure of power relations in society and critique its normalizing effect on how we understand the sex/gender dynamic as a restrictive binary (e.g. heterosexual/homosexual, masculine/ feminine). In this sense, queer theory is a mode of doing rather than being (i.e. a fixed queer identity or position) that seeks to protest against the 'idea of normal behaviour' rather than the heterosexual, as Warner puts it (1993, p. xxvi). For our purposes, as a deconstructive practice, queer theory proves invaluable because it underscores the instability of binaries in everyday life and the violence done by the gender and sexual norms that sustain them, thereby destabilizing a humanist ontology predicated on absolute essences and polar opposites.

Third, we tap into the politics of queer theory to adopt a political stance that is manifest in how we, as management researchers, are driven by a desire to expose exclusionary and oppressive practices conditioned by heteronormativity. In so doing we connect with a nascent organizational literature on queer theory (Harding et al., 2011; Lee, Learmonth and Harding, 2008; Parker, 2002; Rumens, 2012; Tyler and Cohen, 2008) that seeks to destabilize normative constructions of phenomena such as management, leadership, public administration and workplace friendships, as well as examining the habitual reproduction of heteronormativity in organization. Similar to Parker (2002), we mobilize queer theory as a set of conceptual tools that allow us to refocus the agenda of critical scholarship on business and management schools to take account of the content of discourses of heteronormativity, but also how they work and what effects they produce. In this vein, queer theory may also incite a politics for devising effective strategies for confronting and resisting the discursive operation of heteronormativity (Halperin, 1995, 2012). It may even pave the way to creating what Parker (2002, p. 162) calls an 'academy of queers' within business schools, an idea we elaborate on in our concluding discussion. Thus we opt for an empirical rather than solely theoretical examination of gay male academics in UK business schools which also helps to counter the criticism that queer theory is mostly applied conceptually rather than empirically (Seidman, 1996).

Methods

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight gay male academics from 2010 to 2012 employed in six different business and management schools in the UK. Their ages ranged from early 30s to early 60s. We consciously recruited a limited number of participants as 'qualitative research that aims to study constructions of the self' (Harding, Ford and Gough, 2010, p. 161) requires a more intensive approach. As Crouch and McKenzie (2006, p. 483) argue, small samples are preferable when researchers wish to be 'immersed in the research field, to establish continuing, fruitful relationships with respondents and through theoretical contemplation to address the research problem in depth'. The interviews were conducted in two stages: the first ones lasted between one and three hours and were conducted in a location of the interviewees' preference where they felt comfortable and relaxed. All participants took part in a second interview lasting between 45 minutes to one and a half hours. The interviews were all tape recorded and transcribed.

To negotiate access to participants, we used a snowballing technique commonly deployed in studies on LGBT people who constitute a sensitive and hard to reach 'invisible' social group (Browne, 2005). We approached LGBT colleagues known to us to initiate chains of referrals. We then asked participants referred to us to contact other gay male academics employed in business and management schools. Eligibility criteria for participation were inclusive for the group we wished to access: 'looking to interview gay men employed in business and management schools in the UK'. The recruitment process involved sending out information about the study to potential participants which complied with institutional ethics governance. Through chains of referrals we received 18 expressions of interest from gay male academics in business and management schools, all of whom were hugely supportive of our study. However, many of these potential participants articulated concerns about being easily identified on the basis that, as one prospective interviewee wrote in an email, 'academia is a small world, even smaller is the field of management . . . the risk of being identified is too high'. Despite offering robust assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, what is telling here is the concern and anxiety that structures a perception of being easily identified as a gay man who is brave enough to speak out about issues like workplace homophobia. Aside from 2 participants we recruited directly, 18 participants were referred to us, but 12 in this latter category eventually declined interviews, introducing a degree of self-selection into the sample.

All our interviewees identified as being 'openly gay' at work, which sets further parameters on our sample. Still, it would be an oversimplification to homogenize our participants' backgrounds in this respect. For example, participants' openness about their sexual identity is contextually contingent. Participants were diverse in terms of ethnicity and race and the types of post- and pre-1992 universities they were employed by.[2] Our decision to provide only the briefest of demographic detail about our interviewees, referred to in this paper using pseudonyms, complies with the requests of our participants to maximize anonymity and confidentiality.

Our approach to interviewing was flexible, whereby each author used the interview schedule to enable the interviewee to lead the discussion. First stage interviews were designed to encourage the men (1) to generally discuss their current and past work lives as academics in business and management schools (e.g. working conditions, promotion experiences, teaching and research activities); (2) to talk about their experiences as gay men in these academic environments (e.g. identity disclosure issues, incidents of homophobia); and (3) to explore how their working lives, and sense of self as academics and as gay men, are lived and experienced in particular academic work contexts in and around the management classroom (e.g. interactions with colleagues, students and managers; LGBT political activism; creating networks of support). In line with 'queer' interviewing techniques (Kong, Mahoney and Plummer, 2001), we sought to reject an essentialist construction of gay male identity which would crudely reduce our participants to heteronormative constructions of gay male sexuality. We did this, in part, by allowing interviewees to guide our interview conversations, allowing us to gain rich insights into the complex lives (re)constructed by our participants. As gay male academics ourselves, we approached the participants with self-awareness, acknowledging the contingency and fluidity of sexuality and gender, which helped to build relations of trust with participants throughout the research process. This type of 'queer reflexivity' (McDonald, 2013) also served as another check against the risk of normalizing or homogenizing the experiences of our interviewees.

Since we are concerned with identifying and problematizing heteronormativity as a power/knowledge regime, and examining the workings and effects of power/knowledge in constituting gay male sexualities in the workplace, data analysis was carried out using discourse analysis techniques grounded in a Foucauldian approach. We were guided in the data analysis process by Foucault's (1979) insistence that knowledge and power are linked, which enabled us to focus our analysis on the norms through which discourses are (re)produced in ways that construct gay male sexualities as '(ab)normal'. As in other discourse analysis research (see Ford, 2006), the process of data analysis was inductive, shaped by what emerges from the data rather than establishing predetermined themes and coding categories. The data were analysed repeatedly by each author independently and together with extensive note-taking to agree categories, which were then related to each other in order to delineate patterns emerging as potential thematic findings. Categories were not treated as distinct and unconnected but relational and linked. This qualitative inductive approach to data analysis is used by other researchers engaging in queer methods and methodologies (Browne and Nash, 2010). However, in line with these and also organization researchers using queer theory (Harding et al., 2011; Lee, Learmonth and Harding, 2008; Tyler and Cohen, 2008), we trained the analysis process towards queering themes that emerge from the data: examining active norms, deploying multiple reading strategies and interpretative stances, identifying and problematizing what is constructed as 'normal' (Harding et al., 2011). Three themes emerged from this iterative process of analysis and our mobilization of queer theories: (1) the construction of 'normal' gay sexuality; (2) gay sexual politics within the management classroom; (3) challenging heteronormativities in business and management schools. These are presented in the following section.

The construction of 'normal'gay sexuality

In this section, we derive insights from queer theory to underscore how heteronormativity routinely insists that sexuality is categorized and controlled (Butler, 1990; Halperin, 1995;

Warner, 1993), and examine how discursive practices constitute and constrain viable subject positions for gay male academics.

Thus when Brady (senior lecturer), one of our study participants, spoke about his initial sense of relief at being able to participate in organizational life as an openly gay man after securing a job as a lecturer in a 'gay-friendly' business school, we can extend our line of analysis to reveal how the construction of becoming 'openly gay' at work is mediated by sexual and gender norms carried in organizational discourses of heteronormativity. While the perceived gay-friendliness of his business school work environment partly conditions the possibility for Brady to derive pleasure from his subject position as an openly gay man, the expression of such openness at work is not unfettered and alterable at will. This is evident in how Brady discusses his openness at work as not 'flaunting [his] sexuality', by not disclosing 'too much detail' about his 'private life', deciding to 'dress conservatively' and not engaging in overt forms of LGBT political activism. Arguably, this finding is nothing we do not know already about how gay men normalize sexuality in ways that are palatable to, typically heterosexual, colleagues (see Woods and Lucas, 1993). However, through a queer theory lens we can observe how such discursive constructions do not signal the end of sexual normativity coded in heterosexuality but reproduce a restrictive heterosexual/homosexual binary. This is exemplified in Edgar's (reader) account of working life in a management department:

> Being gay at work is almost as insignificant as the clothes I'm wearing because it's normal. I'm not saying I'd prefer to be straight but normal is being straight, and I'm normal like the straight people I work with . . . and being normal at work is not an issue . . . I work in a very corporate business school where there's no expectation on me to conform to some eccentric gay stereotype . . . if I did I'd stick out like a sore thumb . . . instead it [gay sexuality] just sits there as a part of me and I blend in with everyone else.

Notable in Edgar's commentary is how 'being gay at work' is constructed as 'normal', defined in terms of ordinariness and fashioned to be as unassuming as the clothes he wears to work. From one viewpoint, we are encouraged by Edgar's assertion of normality as a gay man at work, particularly within a business school environment that might have been impossible or improbable decades earlier. This appears to provide some relief to Edgar who does not feel compelled, or impelled, to occupy a stereotypical gay male subject position. However, from a queer theory perspective, the discursive engineering that makes his claim to normality possible gives us reason to read this interview extract more cautiously. In Edgar's case, referencing normality is discursively aligned with being heterosexual, and with the naturalization of heterosexuality comes the presumption that it is attached to forms of behaviour and values that do not disrupt heteronormativity (Ahmed, 2006; Warner, 1999). Thus the heterosexual/homosexual binary remains intact even though the normality ascribed to gay male sexuality in the workplace might condition the possibilities for intimacy and supportive relationships with heterosexuals to emerge (Rumens, 2012). Such interview accounts expose the instabilities and anxieties that permeate claims made by gay men to essential heteronormality (Halperin, 2012). For Edgar, it is about conforming to dominant heteronormative organizational expectations. But interview data also revealed that subscribing to an ideal model of a 'normal' gay man is precarious, especially when violence done through heterosexual norms can derail a subject's capacity to sustain a viable sense of self (Butler, 2004).

Such discursive struggles were experienced by several junior academics who felt pressured to be credible researchers and demonstrate collegiality and technical competence in the management classroom. Michael explains:

> When I first started at X university, I was asked by my boss to give a presentation to the subject group about my [LGBT] research interests . . . I welcomed the opportunity

> and my boss saw it as an opportunity for me to demonstrate my scholarly credentials . . . after finishing, the first question I got asked was: 'I suppose that means I have to be politically correct and not say "I'm going out for a fag?" After that I never spoke about my research interests to the group again. (Michael, lecturer)

In this example, the desire for recognition as both a gay and a well-credentialed academic is regulated by existing heteronormative frameworks upon which men like Michael find themselves snagged. Here a discourse of political correctness is invoked by one of Michael's colleagues pejoratively, which belittles the content and value of LGBT research, positioning Michael as someone who might police the language and activities of others. The pleasure associated with being given a platform to promote understanding about LGBT research is undercut by the pain of negotiating newly emerging academic subjectivities that appear to (mis)align with heteronormative expectations and norms. Unlike Edgar, who seems to embrace the norms that pull him towards integration into a heteronormative majority, Michael opts for withdrawal, forging a 'solitary existence' within his institution. The long-term viability of this strategy is questionable when junior academics like Michael, employed in research-active business schools, must be deemed 'successful' to pass probation.

Gay sexual politics within the management classroom

In this section, queer theory enables us to analyse how discourses of heteronormativity encourage study participants to construct splintered identities in the management classroom, wherein distinctions are discursively generated between normative constructions of self-identification as 'gay' versus 'queer'. It is important to acknowledge that teaching contexts in business and management schools can have specific discursive conditions that bring a strong influence to bear on how heteronormativity is manifest and negotiated by study participants. Dylan's example is illustrative:

> I was lecturing to a group of about 100 MBA students on sexual orientation in the workplace when one [adult] student interrupted me and shouted: 'I cannot see why homosexuality is relevant on a management degree, it's disgusting'. Some other students murmured in agreement . . . I didn't know what to do. I wanted the ground to open up and swallow me whole. Afterwards I felt like a bad teacher, completely out of my depth. (Dylan, lecturer)

Dylan engages with a discourse of homophobia that positions homosexuality as offensive and, by association, the homosexual as a misfit and interloper without authority in pedagogical discourses circulated on an MBA degree programme. The abruptness of this outburst and the context in which it occurs – a large classroom setting with 100 students – leaves Dylan doubting his ability as an effective 'role model for LGBT students'. Although Dylan is not 'out' to his MBA students, his desire to introduce LGBT perspectives into the management curriculum, to disrupt its heteronormative content, is partly successful given that it conditions this homophobic outburst. But how might someone like Michael respond? From a queer theory perspective, Halperin (1995, pp. 38–39) argues that it is futile to refute the content of homophobic slander because it does 'nothing to impair the strategic functioning of [homophobic] discourses'. However, efforts to create non-heteronormative classroom environments can be costly for those involved, both personally and professionally.

Participants such as Nigel (senior lecturer) felt incorporating self-disclosure into his teaching strategy was a valuable opportunity for undermining heteronormativity in the management classroom, but he acknowledged that it was a 'risky business', potentially exposing himself to ridicule and persecution (Taylor, 2013). However, Nigel cited contextual factors such as the growing body of academic research on LGBT people and the introduction of the Equality Act (2010) as having a positive effect on creating non-heteronormative teaching contexts. Jeremy (senior lecturer) also cited the same influences, enabling him to self-disclose to students to counter the erasure of LGBT presence on campus after the vandalism of the LGBT society's notice board. Yet the ways in which some participants discursively constructed gay sexualities within teaching environments (un)wittingly produced a restrictive identity binary of a different kind:

> I have been open with some of my postgrad students but I hold back . . . after I come out I tend drop clues about my lifestyle that signifies my middle-classness, my affluence, my veneer of respectability . . . It's mad because I'm presenting a cosy normal version of myself as a gay man which is not how I live my life . . . students would be shocked to hear that I want to fuck heteronormativity right in the eye. (Michael, lecturer)

> It's dangerous to come out as queer . . . business students will conjure up all manner of things in their heads about being sexually promiscuous, a rainbow flag waving political nutter . . . someone who is out to cause trouble. I consciously veer away from that persona. (Edgar, reader)

These extracts reveal how queer is constructed as a source of awkwardness in the management classroom and thus as a potential irritant of heteronormativity. This presents participants like Michael and Edgar with a discursive dilemma: how to construct themselves as role models for students whilst protecting how they prefer to self-identify as gay men. Strikingly, the data indicate a splitting identity strategy used by Michael, not to fashion a public–private divide where one is out as gay in the private sphere but closeted in the public sphere of work as commonly reported in previous research (Woods and Lucas, 1993), but to create a separation between an 'out gay' from a 'closeted queer' identity. Such identity constructions are conditioned through discourses that permit openly gay identities within educational contexts as long as they conform to heteronormative constructions of gay sexuality (Giddings and Pringle, 2011; Rofes, 2005). Interestingly, Michael discursively constructs a gay male subject position that is classed (as ‘middle-class’) in order to invoke notions of respectability and demonstrate allegiance to heteronormative values. In both excerpts, queer is constructed as something that lies outside heteronormative pedagogical structures. Reconstructed to meet the demands of specific student audiences in certain educational contexts, Michael quarantines his sense of self as queer (Rofes, 2005).

From a queer theory perspective, these quotes show that constructing a presence as an openly gay academic requires the reproduction of queer as an absent Other. In formulating this binary, gay male sexuality becomes more aligned with heteronormativity, a cleaned up version that endorses social stability and sustains a heteronormative moral order. Troubling here is that gay visibility is permitted through all but the narrowest of apertures, obscuring possibilities for considering how queer might alter the content of the management curriculum and how out LGBT and heterosexual academics in business schools might express queerness (Parker, 2002). In these examples, both men actively edit out any queerness to avoid being cast as someone who is ‘out to cause trouble’, and yet the kind of trouble queers might cause, particularly in terms of binary bashing, is vital to creating non-heteronormative learning environments (Taylor, 2013).

Challenging heteronormativity within business and management schools

In this section, we draw on queer theory to examine how study participants might contest heteronormative constructions of gay male sexuality in the workplace, understanding how these can squelch opportunities for developing alternative subjectivities which may destabilize rigid sexual norms. As such, we explore the discursive struggles of those participants for whom the heteronormativity of their academic work settings is worth challenging, with the aim of considering how business and management schools might become queer(er) places of work.

Study findings show a varied picture where some participants are located within ostensibly LGBT-friendly management departments while others are situated in more inhospitable work environments and feel disconnected from colleagues who either identify as LGBT or are LGBT allies. In both contexts, data showed that participants may hold little confidence in the stance adopted by their institutions towards LGBT equality. This influenced the areas of support participants could access in challenging heteronormativity at work. For example, one important method of contesting heteronormativities within the business schools was (re)constituting LGBT issues as credible academic research topics. Here, however, some participants were confronted by assumptions of LGBT research being insubstantially rigorous and unable to find a home in the top business journals. Supported by other LGBT colleagues, Adam described his 'struggles' to 'validate sexual orientation research within [his] business school'. Adam negotiated with management about the 'value' of LGBT scholarship, mobilizing a discourse of 'corporate social responsibility' in order to posit LGBT organizational issues as 'substantial' and 'commercially appealing'. Other participants, however, especially those who felt isolated, abandoned negotiations with senior officials in their institutions, opting instead to conduct research on 'vanilla' business topics such as performance management, organization strategy and change management. In these situations, study participants appeared to elicit more favourable reactions and offers of support from line managers.

Conversely, Edgar (reader) reasoned that, when discursively framed in terms of organizational outcomes such as performance and efficiency, LGBT issues were able to 'gain more than a toehold in business schools as serious organizational issues'. Here Edgar uses discourse as a strategic resource to support an LGBT-inclusive research agenda. This is evidenced by the growing LGBT organizational scholarship structured by mainstream management concerns, yet it is questionable how far this scholarship challenges or 'queers' the heteronormativity of management knowledge and enables LGBT research to contribute towards queering business and management schools. From a queer perspective, how LGBT research is discursively coded within business and management schools (e.g. as part of 'diversity management' debates or 'politically disruptive') influences which versions of gay male academic selves get to be constituted, get to be heard and gain legitimacy as 'successful', with consequences for gay men unable to inhabit heteronormative positions of academic business school researchers (e.g. Michael, introduced earlier). Some participants recognized the power effects such discourses can produce, motivating them to contest heteronormative authority, thereby empowering LGBT practices of knowledge generation:

> You can promote different causes . . . , you can champion different issues. You will have platforms to raise different topics. So I use those kinds of powers . . . I am able to influence some decisions in terms of methodological choices, themes of topics and because I am gay . . . I bring a new dimension to the study of management. People are more willing to study . . . sexual orientation topics at work because I am quite open and out. (Frank, professor)

Such strategies can be very effective for problematizing the heteronormativity of management scholarship, and fostering reverse discourses that promote alternative non-heteronormative ways of understanding LGBT sexualities in organization. Frank is an example of someone who appears less concerned with attacking the content of particular heteronormative discourses (although this is crucially important) and more aware, to use Halperin's words (1995, p. 38), of 'how the game has been set up, on what terms most favorable to whom, with what consequences for which of its players'. Put differently, Frank exemplifies a Foucauldian stance towards trying to connect new forms of power and knowledge with new objects (Foucault, 1979) and in new domains such as business schools. This form of discursive counter-practice is more strategic, although contingent on Frank's network of LGBT colleagues and allies to realize the potential to effectively resist the presumptive claims of heteronormative discourses about the 'value' of LGBT organizational research. Frank's actions foreshadow how business and management schools might become queer(er) places to work. On that matter, Adam's remarks are particularly poignant:

> For me, queer is radical . . . the gay movement [has] moved away from being queer, being radical, being edgy, being different, being rage and protest and has actually accepted the whole normalizing, assimilationist view of sexuality . . . In terms of this business school, there are no queers. (Adam, senior lecturer)

If business and management schools are to create conditions in which LGBT academics and students might speak for themselves then, for Adam at least, this implies a form of queer activism that is against assimilation and conformity with dominant heterosexual values. Such statements expose a perception of how wider contemporary LGBT politics in the UK has become assimilationist (Richardson and Monro, 2012), with its effects felt in the business school in terms of who can be present – where are the queers? Along these lines there is a temptation to berate the claims to essential normality made by participants such as Edgar as foolish and politically naive because they perpetuate discourses of heteronormativity. Here, then, Adam exposes a dilemma because he (un)wittingly constructs a dichotomy that serves to classify different types of gay men (as either assimilationist or transgressive) which threatens to reproduce inequalities within and among LGBT people, by establishing a hierarchy of suitability among queer and non-queer identities. In that respect, Adam's commentary serves as a platform for considering further the salience of queer identities, selves, modes of organizing and forms of pedagogy for disrupting the heteronormativity of the business school without articulating another type of exclusionary logic.

In summary, through a queer theory lens we have examined the challenges facing gay male academics involved in discursively constructing gay sexuality as ‘normal’ in the context of workplace heteronormativity in and around the management classroom. Crucially, we have provided insights into how gay men may challenge heteronormativities in business and management schools, which prompts us to ask: how can we make these queer(er) institutions?

Concluding discussion: towards queer(er) business and management schools

This paper addresses the serious shortage of research on LGBT sexualities and heteronormativity within UK business and management schools, through a queer theoretical lens which critically examines the perspectives of gay male academics. We contribute to a growing management literature on queer theory (Harding et al., 2011; Lee, Learmonth and Harding, 2008; McDonald, 2013; Rumens, 2012; Tyler and Cohen, 2008), thinking through how business and management schools could be queer(er) institutions (Parker, 2002) and responding to the call of those scholars for whom queer theory is not merely a theory of or for LGBT people (Halley and Parker, 2011). Queer theory’s semantic flexibility, ‘its weird ability to touch almost everything, is one of the most exciting things about it’, as Love (2011, p. 182) puts it. It is a political tool for challenging normal behaviour, norms, and what is deemed normative within an array of social milieu and institutions (Halperin, 1995, 2012), including business and management schools. In this paper we draw queer theory away from its well established enclave and the éclat it enjoys in the humanities into management studies, a discipline that has yet to take full advantage of what queer theory has to offer.

As demonstrated above, one significant offering that queer theory has for management scholars is that it works at the site of ontology, exposing sexuality as a cultural invention rather than an intrinsic property of an individual (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1979; Halperin, 1995) oriented statically to a specific object of desire (Ahmed, 2006). When pressed into the service of destabilizing essentialist ontologies of sexuality, queer theories can enable management scholars to acknowledge the possibilities for contemplating how certain sexualities, most typically but not always heterosexuality, are ascribed privileged status that seems ordinary, 'natural' and unquestioned. How gay male academics negotiate heteronormativity at work demonstrates the significance of this point. Busily engaged in (re)constructing sexual identities, they throw into sharp relief the discursive restrictions effected through and within a heterosexual/homosexual binary, imposed most noticeably on those participants who seek to establish a 'normal' sense of self and identity at work. For management scholars, queer theory gives rise to a set of seldom raised questions about how discourses of heteronormativity operate strategically in the business and management schools. In that respect, one striking but disturbing study finding is that building and sustaining viable selves and identities as openly gay men within heteronormative discourses leads to a bifurcation of 'gay' identity as either 'gay' or 'queer'. Viable, visible gay identities within business school contexts are likely to be those which comply closely with heterosexual norms, occasioning discursive opportunities for gay men to identify as 'normal'. However, by mobilizing discourses of heteronormativity, some participants reproduce a cultural logic of exclusion through the placement of gay and queer within a hierarchical binary that subordinates the latter. In this binary, queer is narrowly understood as only ever being disruptive, over-sexualized, radical and even destructive and, as such, must be contained or managed out altogether. This finding adds a new dimension to the organization literature on

LGBT sexualities which has yet to examine fully how queer is variously present and negated within organizations, and what effects this produces for developing viable subjectivities.

More specifically, this paper connects and contributes to a nascent management literature on queer theory. For example, our study provides an empirical dimension to Parker's (2002) conceptual article on queering management and organization, in particular his call for developing an 'academy of queers' within business schools that may include LGBT people and their allies. But it is also about 'queering the idea of the academy' itself (2002, p. 184), whereby discursive spaces might be opened up for queers and others to reimagine a university, or business school, differently, so it might 'work against itself in some playful and productive ways' (2002, p. 162).

In regard to cultivating an academy of queers and queering business and management schools, the study findings invite the question: who might travel under a 'queer' identity or engage with queer theories to dismantle the heterosexual/ homosexual binary that sustains heteronormativity within these institutions? Our study has highlighted possibilities, not least the opportunities for gay men to come forward from the fringes and maintain a visible presence within these institutions, albeit discursive constraints. As noted above, these discursive constraints cast queer as a foe of the business school and code for an undesirable manifestation of gay male sexuality in these work contexts. As some of our participants reasoned, business and management schools must allow queer to be expressed in multitudinous ways; for instance, as an identity, position, attitude, mode of organizing or form of political activism. This requires business and management schools to allow queer some accommodation within policy statements, the curriculum and research activities (Morrish and O'Mara, 2011). At the same time, we are acutely aware of the susceptibility of queer theory to co-optation into the heteronormative mainstream, noticeable in parts of the humanities (Halley and Parker, 2011), criticized as a meaningless signifier and emptied of its political power. However, we sound a note of optimism in light of Douglas Creed's concern that the heteronormativity of 'many business schools will not [make them] amenable places for conducting research on heterosexism in organisations' (2005, p. 392) – or, indeed, on or using queer theory. There is enough antagonism towards queer theory within business and management schools to sustain its symbiotic relationship with what is understood as normal and normative, perhaps fuelling the determination of its supporters to introduce it, undetected and unexpected, into the management curriculum, classroom and research.

Finally, this study hopes to inspire further queer theory research within organization studies such as that conducted by Harding et al. (2011) and by Rumens (2012). Both provide empirical and theoretical insights into how organizations may be understood and experienced differently; for example, how we might do 'leadership' differently, that transcends organizational life structured through domination, or, as Rumens (2012) argues, how gay male subjects undertake experiments in relating at work that depart from (hetero) normative models of human relations. In both cases, the use of queer theory allows us to reimagine organizations wherein such things as sexuality, stereotypically understood within management circles as a negative force that must be repressed (Riach and Wilson, 2007), can instead empower and pleasure. What is more, it contributes to ongoing scholarly efforts to transform business and management schools into critically reflexive institutions (Ford, Harding and Learmonth, 2010; Parker, 2002). As such we end by issuing a call for future management research that experiments with queer theory as well as generating new knowledge about how LGBT people variously negotiate and, crucially, challenge the heteronormative dynamics of business and management schools.

End notes

1. UK higher education institutions are subject to periodic review of their research output by a centralized system of quality assessment called the Research Excellence Framework.

2. Post-1992 institutions are classified as former polytechnics which gained the right to offer their own degrees as a result of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

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