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Gender, the Body and Organization Studies: Que(e)rying Empirical Research

Abstract

Even in organization studies scholarship which treats gender as performative and fluid, a certain 'crystallization' of gender identities as somehow unproblematic and stable may occur because of our methodological decision-making, and especially our categorization of participants. Mobilizing queer theory as a conceptual lens, in particular Judith Butler's work on the heterosexual matrix and performativity, we examine this crystallization, suggesting it is based on two implicit assumptions; that gender is a cultural mark over a passive biological body or a base identity 'layered over' by other identities (class, race, age etc.). Following Butler, we argue that, to foreground the fluidity and uncertainty of gender categories in our scholarship, it is necessary to understand gender identity as a process of doing and undoing gender which is located very precisely in time and space. Given this perspective on gender identities as complex processes of identification, non-identification and performativity, we offer some pointers on how the methodological decision-making underpinning empirical research on gender, work and organization could and should begin from this premise.

Keywords: Body, Gender, Empirical Research, Identity, Judith Butler, Organization Studies, Queer Theory

Introduction

The recent discovery of the cave-dwelling insect Neotrogla by Yoshizawa *et al.* (2014), published in the journal *Current Biology*, has attracted considerable media attention. The widespread interest focuses on the female Neotrogla's elaborate penis – the 'gynosome' - which penetrates the male insect's vagina to collect sperm for reproduction. Yoshizawa *et al*. emphasize that nothing "similar is known among sex-role reversed animals" (2014, p. 1006). The Neotrogla is a fascinating example of a species where what appear to be biological sex characteristics (the penis and the vagina) 'belong to' the wrong sexes. It is yet more interesting in the sense that the gynosome is equipped with "numerous spines" which perform "an anchoring function to grasp and hold mates” (*ibid.*) for a long time. This ensures that as much sperm as possible is collected because the dryness of the Neotrogla’s cave habitat makes food hard to come by, creating “strong selection pressure for increased female mating rate” (*ibid*., p. 1007). Female insects are therefore also the sexual aggressors of the species, whereas the male insect is the sperm carrier and fertilizes the female.

Neotrogla is the first known species to have disrupted the body-sex-gender nexus in quite this way. Although females in other species have penis-like organs (including some mites and beetles) and in others are the sexual aggressors (eg, the ground weta beetle), no other species combines female penetration - thus ‘natural’ sex organ reversal - with the anchoring function of the gynosome – thus gender role or identity reversal, at least if we use social scientific language. This body-sex-gender nexus, of course, forms one of the most persistent debates in the social sciences. The notion of a deterministic relation between body, sex and gender has been most robustly problematized by queer theorists; and, in organization studies, we have seen the increasing use of queer theory to unpack such phenomena for at least the last decade and a half. Neotrogla, we might suggest, is an insect which profoundly queers the nexus, demonstrating a discursively unintelligible relationship between genital organs, sex attribution and gender role/ identity.

With Neotrogla in mind, in this paper we take off from the aforementioned body of empirical research in organization studies which deploys concepts from queer theory. Our aim is to think through the possibilities in this scholarship for further disruption of the categories of sex and gender produced by what Judith Butler (1990) calls the ‘heterosexual matrix’ and its biologically necessitarian effects. We are interested in how our empirical projects on gender, work and organization might better refuse the biological anatomy of the body as a basis for the categorizing of research subjects into male/ masculine and female/ feminine identities. As such, we explore the unintentional byproducts of a putative disconnect between analytic frameworks inflected through queer concepts and methodologies which implicitly assume the existence of stable gender identities. We agree with Harding *et al.* (2012) when they suggest that organization studies scholarship has only scratched the surface of what it is possible to do in gender research when using queer approaches, and with Ozturk and Rumens’ (2014, p. 513) observation that our discipline “has yet to take full advantage of what queer theory has to offer”. Specifically, we examine the effects of organizational scholarship inspired by queer concepts which hails participants whose gender is, implicitly, understood as a cultural mark on the biological body and/ or as a fundamental base identity on which other differences are layered. We discuss the use of gender categories in empirical organizational research based on queer concepts, using our own work as an illustration and providing a detailed overview of key arguments from queer theory to dissect these twin determinist notions. We analyse the notion of gender as a cultural mark in section 3, and of gender as a base identity in section 4.

Our argument draws on insights from the work of Judith Butler as someone who has been constructed as a core figure in queer theory, as well as on scholars who mobilize her ideas in specific ways (Cronin and King, 2010; Gormann-Murray *et al.*, 2010; Nash, 2010; Muhr and Sullivan, 2013). While some may wish to read this article as a Butlerian account or indeed invoke her famous assertion that "I'm a feminist before I'm a queer theorist" (Butler *et al*., 1994, p. 34), we prefer to frame our discussion as a queering intervention inspired by Butler's writing and by these other scholars, all of whom have used Butler's work queerly. We rely on Butler's (1990, 1993a, 1993b) concepts of the heterosexual matrix and performativity because they, like other aspects of her writing, have been the most influential in organization studies research which uses queer concepts; and because her understanding of performativity especially allows us to make a series of theoretical observations about 'fixing' and 'unfixing' gender in our discipline. This we do in the fifth section of the paper ('Performativity and the body'), which provides a crucial lead into our final section ('Que(e)rying empirical research in organization studies') where we sketch out how we might approach gender and the body differently in our empirical work. To begin, we briefly summarize the take up of queer theory in empirical organizational research.

Queer theory and organization studies

Queer theory emerged during the early 1990s within the humanities, within which it has a long pedigree and has exerted a major influence on the study of gender, sex and the body (Jagose, 1996). Parker (2001) was one of the first to 'bring queer' to the study of organizations, with his article 'Fucking Management: Queer, Theory and Reflexivity'. This paper ushered in the substantive use of queer theory in our discipline, mainly in scholarship about workplace gender and sexuality. Queer theory concepts have been used to study a range of organization studies themes, including friendship at work (Rumens, 2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2012); leadership (Harding *et al.*, 2011; Muhr and

Sullivan, 2013); subjectivity and identity (Bowring and Brewis, 2009; Calás *et al.*, 2013; McDonald, 2013; Scurry *et al.*, 2013; Ozturk and Rumens, 2014); beauty, size and the body from a marketing perspective (Gurrieri and Cherrier, 2013); sex education organizations (Thanem, 2010); sexuality as a 'silent' element of workplace relationships (Beckett, 2012); gender and performativity (Tyler and Cohen, 2008; Baines, 2010; Billing, 2011); humour (Kenny and Euchler, 2012); and the relations between space and gender (Tyler and Cohen, 2010). This is significant, insightful and provocative work which follows the tradition established in the humanities for understanding queer theory as an incessant, reflexive form of critique aimed at what is considered 'normal', by interrogating how norms restrict discursive possibilities for subjects to identify, relate and organize in everyday life (Halperin, 1995; Warner, 1999). However, far less remarked upon in this organization studies research is how queer theory's critical questioning of what is normal, in particular how subjects are corralled into normative identity categories, can shape the methodological decision-making underpinning how those we study are identified as belonging to gender categories or identities in the empirical process of data production. This is, in our view, a serious omission that if left unaddressed does little to minimize the risks of organization studies researchers interested in advancing performative notions of gender and identity falling into an essentialist trap of reifying research participants' identities. In other words, we argue here that the use of queer theory as a conceptual framework in organization studies scholarship – including our own – tends not to be accompanied by methodologies which queer the empirical field. Instead, we assume that all research participants classified as 'women' have a vagina and all those classified as 'men' have a penis. Insodoing we may reproduce exactly the gendered stabilities and consistencies which queer theory is intent on subverting in our data gathering. By the same token, we exclude from consideration anyone who does not conform to these biologistic categories – but may nonetheless identify as a 'man' or a 'woman' - from our enquiries. When these individuals appear in our empirical projects, they do so bearing labels like 'transgender'.

To elaborate, queer theory allows us to emphasize the importance of transgressing this logic to suggest that we can do more empirically to disrupt the stability of gender categories. After all, as Watson (2005, p. 67) suggests, queer theory "has been primarily interested in how such categories … came to be seen as stable identities". Queer theory understands gender as cultural, fluid, problematic and unstable, the most profound example of which is Butler's performative ontology of gender. For Butler, gender identities are constructed by discursive norms. When a baby is born – and often prior to that due to ultrasound technology and its genitally deterministic detection of a baby's 'sex' in the womb (Butler, 1993b, p. 7) - and named as a 'girl', heterosexual norms initiate the symbolic process that acts to produce 'her' body, gestures, behaviours, clothes, desire to be a wife and mother, and so on. This process produces someone as a viable subject – it 'girls' 'her'. Gender "is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment" (Butler, 1993a, p. 23). It is a performative act which brings discursive regulations to life. Performativity thus affirms the power of the heterosexual matrix - and its reproduction of binary identities such as male versus female, masculine versus feminine, heterosexual versus homosexual, and so on - through the constant repetition of norms.

Mobilizing Butler's performative notion of gender, we contend that organization studies researchers could undertake empirical work which more effectively subverts any notion that gender categories proceed from the biological body, starting from a queer theory perspective that underscores their very instability. Queer theory allows us to examine how the unstable elements present in gender identities are tamed by the preponderance of the biological body in the process of categorization (Swan, 2010), so that our empirical research on gender might play an overly authoritative role in "articulating the[se identities], reifying them, and thus making them what they are" (Weston, 2009, p. 139).

As an alternative to what might be read as the dominance of the biological body and the stability of gender categories it produces, some organization studies researchers (eg, Baines, 2010; Billing, 2011; Gurrieri and Cherrier, 2013) introduce ambiguity and incoherence to these categories by importing sexuality, race, age, ethnicity, class and so on. This is done to show how the category 'women', say, is fragmented by these other differences. We agree wholeheartedly that these identities cut across the process of gender (re/de)construction. But this does not mean that we can *only* understand gender as fragmented and complex in this way. Indeed, as Calás *et al.* (2013) suggest, an approach using other identity components to make gender more complex and problematic could itself be seen as grounded in identity-based categorical schemes. In other words, Calás *et al.* argue that in this sort of analysis gender is considered a more or less stable core over which other elements are 'layered'. Again then this might reproduce gender as a fixed category. Conceptualizing gender as always fragile, specific and variegated, we contend, is therefore more than just a question of understanding how it is fissured by other identity categories. Queer theory problematizes gender itself, analysing each gender category as unstable and mobile across time and space (Butler, 1990, 1993a, 2004; Halberstam, 2005), because of its intent to challenge normative knowledges and identities (Halperin, 1995).

As such, organization studies research inspired by queer theory can, as we elaborate here, progress yet further via different kinds of empirical project. Drawing in more detail on Butler's (1990, 1993a, 1993b, 1999, 2004) work, we now outline the problems associated with conceptualizations of gender in which it is considered as a mark over a passive body and/ or as a base identity.

Gender as a cultural mark

Scott (1986) affirms that initially the term gender was forged to mean something cultural, as distinct from a biological sex. Here sex is a biological product that belongs to the natural order, while gender is a cultural product. The body is thus 'untouchable', unproblematic, biologically determined as either male or female and a stable matter 'over which' gender acts. So the term gender first appeared as signifying a cultural mark inscribed on a pre-discursive, anatomically determined body. However, despite the claim that sex is biological and gender cultural and that the latter is somehow "radically independent" of the former, this view is based on a direct relation between sex, gender and sexuality: biological sex determines cultural gender and gender determines sexuality. As such, Butler (1999, p. 10) argues that the 'gender as cultural' thesis is by no means radical enough, because "the presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relationship of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it".

By way of contrast, she identifies this nexus of body-sex-gender(-sexuality) as a set of regulatory practices, operating according to norms, which is described in *Gender Trouble* as the heterosexual matrix[1]. It produces 'intelligible' genders: "those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire" (Butler, 1999, p. 23). For Butler, moreover, to think of gender as a mark is a characteristic of the metaphysics of substance present in the humanist conceptualization of the subject. This humanist approach "tend[s] to assume a substantive person who is the bearer of various essential and nonessential attributes. A humanist feminist position might understand gender as an attribute of a person who is characterized essentially as a pregendered substance or 'core'" (*ibid.*, p. 14). The core pre-gendered substance or foundational aspect of cultural gender is the body, and this biological body is the 'essence' that determines gender.

Thus Butler (*ibid.*, p. 11 – emphasis in original) affirms that approaches which understand gender as a culturally-defined attribute of a person suggest that "'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'prediscursive', prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts". Herein lies "a certain determinism of gender meanings inscribed on anatomically differentiated bodies, where those bodies are understood as passive recipients of an inexorable cultural law" (*ibid.*, p. 12). Butler provides a trenchant criticism of these perspectives, and Preciado (2002) likewise rejects the notion that the body is passive. She affirms the body as a place for resistance, declaring its political condition and seeking to unsettle the processes which legitimize nature as the 'hub' of gender *assujetissement.* With this, Preciado also rejects the belief that sexual differences are biological truths inherent in natural bodies. Her work is a manifesto in which bodies must be understood not as male nor female, but as active speaker bodies that can escape from all practices of signification produced by biopolitics, such as the effects of the heterosexual matrix.

Somewhat similarly for Butler, if we take the notion of gender as constructed to its logical conclusion, then it "becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (1999, p. 10 - emphasis in original). So, even supposing temporarily that there is a stable binary of sexes, the construction of 'man' should not refer exclusively to 'male' bodies nor 'women' only to 'female' bodies. But, and as significantly, Butler also provides us with a powerful set of arguments around the supposed "univocity" of sex where she insists that cell biologists, for example, have "refused from the outset to consider how [XX-males and XY-females] … implicitly challenge the descriptive force of the available categories of sex" and that they fail to reflect on "whether the description of bodies in terms of binary sex is adequate to the task at hand". As such, Butler concludes that "biomedical inquiries" like these are always and already shaped by "gendered meanings" and "seek to establish 'sex' for us as it is prior to the cultural meanings that it acquires" (*ibid.*, p. 135, p. 139). Moreover, as Butler says emphatically elsewhere in *Gender Trouble*, "we certainly have not apprehended the variation that exists at the level of anatomical description" (*ibid.*, p. xxii).

At the same time, she acknowledges that, if subjects conform to the norms embedded in the heterosexual matrix, they are considered to be ethical people who abide by 'normal' and 'moral' forces. If subjects do not, they are seen as failing because of non-conformity with heteronormative lifestyles; they become what Butler (1993b, 2004) calls abjects[2], taking up 'dysphoric' identities. As a set of regulatory practices, then, the heterosexual matrix both makes gender identities intelligible and also confirms that some identities cannot exist *qua* identities, those which do not follow the determinist relation between body, sex, gender and desire. These are considered developmental failures, logically impossible, and "to find that one is fundamentally unintelligible (indeed, that the laws of culture and of language find one to be an impossibility) is to find that one has not yet achieved access to the human" (Butler, 2004, p. 218). Nonetheless, and critically, these 'developmental failures'' very "persistence and proliferation … provide critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of that domain of intelligibility" (Butler, 1999, p. 24).

Turning back at this point to organization studies, some scholarship that has sought to underscore the performativity of gender arguably fails to sufficiently problematize the intelligibility of gender categories as produced by the heterosexual matrix. Reflecting on our own work to exemplify what we mean, in interviewing gay men about their workplace friendships, Author C (reference removed for blind review) developed an eligibility criterion that targeted 'gay men', and in so doing inadvertently excluded those subjects who might have claims on the identity categories of 'male' and 'gay' - such as people who identify as 'men who have sex with other men', 'bisexual', 'intersex' or 'trans'. Despite the study's use of poststructuralist theories to conceptualize sexuality and gender as fluid, provisional and historically patterned constructs, C's recruitment strategy unwittingly reproduced a construction of gay men as only having biologically 'male' bodies. One consequence of this is that deeper insights into how gay men's workplace friendships may disrupt heteronormative constructions of gender and sexuality at work are obscured, curtailing the diversity of male perspectives and voices C sought to foreground.

Similarly, in interviewing 'women' executives, Authors (reference removed for blind review) selected respondents based on their 'sexed' body – ie, respondents who have a vagina. Authors' research explored what these participants had to say about representations of masculinity and femininity, and they assert that "Representations are not simply descriptions that reflect workers' practices, but instead act as constructors of such … they are [a] cultural means of categorizing, naming and showing a group or individual" (reference removed). On this basis, Authors employed discourse analysis to unpick their empirical data. Nonetheless, the recruitment of biologically female managers, entrepreneurs and directors, via snowball sampling, rules out the participation of other groups who identify to a greater or lesser extent, and perhaps in very mutable and dynamic ways, as women from being considered as women. These include transvestites, transgender individuals and drag queens. In this piece, Authors were concerned with the application of queer concepts to life in organizations, like the claim that "masculinity and femininity are not static entities, nor do they have an essence, they are … historical and cultural products always under construction. Moreover, there are other forms of gender expression beyond the masculine and feminine [and] these forms break the binary conception of gender heteronormativity and performativity" (reference removed). In hailing the participants as 'women', though, Authors risk reifying the biologically-grounded intelligibility of gender produced by the heterosexual matrix.

In sum, queering organization studies research doesn't just mean the use of queer concepts to unpack empirical data, but strengthening its capacity to disrupt and denaturalize the legibility of gender identities. Our empirical studies about 'men' or 'women', especially those which draw on queer theory, should methodologically explore - from participant recruitment onward - how the categories of 'women' and 'men' are defined, identified with, performed, reiterated, reproduced and resisted in the times and locales studied.

Problematizing gender binarity, furthermore, is not just a question of acknowledging that there might be more than two genders in any specific place and time, but also problematizing "both the opposition between them and the internal unity of each" gender category (Louro, 2008, pp. 31-32, our translation). 'Gender' here is understood as the norms which (as it stands) *produce* both feminine and masculine identities and our desire to identify ourselves with *one or other* of these categories. So this dualism is *just one possibility* of gender – not gender itself. Indeed Butler (2004, p. 42) insists that we "keep the term "gender" apart from both masculinity and femininity". She also asserts that gender cannot be an exhaustive category, because it is not coherently constituted in and across specific historical and social contexts and because gender identities literally intersect with – as opposed to existing alongside - racial, class, ethnic, sexual and other discursively constituted identities. We turn to this idea next.

The 'additive model' of gender

Three important interim conclusions about gender identities can now be outlined. First, gender is unstable, incoherent, not an essential identity and always a product of time and space. Second, gender identities are discursively constructed by norms. Third, the intersection of gender identities with other identities renders all these identities more complex, but gender is itself complex and unstable: these intersections are not the foundational event that renders it so. Developing this third point on intersectionality, we cannot infer that each of us has a summation or a number of discrete base identities: gender, sexuality, class, age, ethnicity, race, whatever, which exist side by side. This is what Sullivan calls the 'additive model' of identities, so that "one might describe oneself, for example, as a disabled, indigenous, working-class, lesbian mother" (2003, p. 71). For Sullivan, this logic produces the conclusion that such an individual is oppressed five times over, and is necessarily more oppressed than a disabled, white, working-class, lesbian mother. It involves a "positing of hierarchies of oppression without recognising that the implications of being positioned in one of the above ways are *significantly different* from being positioned in another" (*ibid.*, p. 72 – our emphasis). Beyond that, assuming that all 'women' experience oppression to different degrees depending on the differentiated 'positions' that they occupy viz. sexuality, class and so on also homogenizes the category 'women' even when adding other elements to this category (Swan, 2010).

As Anzaldúa argues, then, identity "is not a bunch of little cubby holes stuffed respectively with intellect, sex, race, class, vocation, gender. Identity flows between, over, aspects of a person" (1991, pp. 252-253). This additive logic does not consider the complexity, multiplicity and ambiguity of the process of identity construction. It does not account for how race, gender, class, age, sexuality and dis/ability, *inter alia*, "inflect and/or infuse one another" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 72). These are not separate, stable axes of identity that criss-cross each other in a specific subjectivity (Barnard, 1999); they are systems of meaning and understanding that act together in a formative way *to define each other*. Indeed, when Butler (1999) says that gender identities intersect with other kinds of identities, she does not advocate that this be understood through an additive model. This would be to consider these identities as universal, unified and stable cores over which various other identities, such as class, age, race and sexuality, are layered. Instead Butler argues that "these categories always work as background for each other, and they often find their most powerful articulation through one other. Thus, [for example] the sexualization of racial gender norms calls to be read through multiple lenses at once and the analysis surely illuminates the limits of gender as an exclusive category of analysis" (*ibid.*, p. xvi).

To illustrate this argument about the limitations of the additive model in empirical organization studies research, Author B (reference removed for blind review) analyses focus group data where (feminine) gender, age and profession are deemed to intersect to produce a specific constellation of experience in a particular city. B positions her argument amongst discussions around the urban experience, the impact of liberal feminism and the stability or otherwise of life-stages. But, despite the emphasis placed on how the participants narrate their own complex realities and on the intersections between gender, age, professional status and urban location, the primary focus of the analysis is indubitably gender. Age, occupation and location are 'deposited on top' of this base identity; so much so that the key 'variable' for inclusion in the participant group was the possession of a 'female' body. The other categories were stretched to accommodate women who did not strictly fulfil B's criteria around age, occupational status or living and working in City X – but all participants were 'biologically' female. As such the interpellation of this type of subject generated findings including readiness or otherwise for *motherhood*, the difficulties of 'doing it all' as a '*woman*' and the *gendered* characteristics perceived to be needed for career success. Moreover, at no point did B ask the participants to reflect on having been interpellated as women, or indeed as occupying the other social categories – these were, in the process of data collection, very much taken as read.

To consider the category 'women' as full of contradictions, then, is to do more than just 'fill' the members of this category with other elements (here age, occupation and location) to make them 'complete'. Instead, the very terms 'women' or 'men' become incomplete, permitting each "to serve as a permanently available site of contested meanings. The definitional incompleteness of the category might then serve as a normative ideal relieved of coercive force" (Butler, 1999, p. 21). Hence, in empirical organization studies research, we suggest it would serve us to explore the contours, variegations and possibilities of gender categories in the specific time and place where the research is undertaken, not beforehand.

As we have already suggested, Butler also argues that the persistent understanding of a stable subject that represents all ‘women’/ ‘men’ in the world produces various extremely significant refusals to accept these categories. This reveals exclusions and the regulatory power relations of gender construction even when such an understanding is deployed in the name of emancipation, pointing out the limits of identity politics. However, Butler (1999, p. 8) does not suggest that affirming the instability of the categories means we should stop using these terms, because the important political task “is not to refuse representational politics – as if we could. The juridical structure of language and politics constitute the contemporary field of power: hence, there is no position outside this field, but only a critical genealogy of its own legitimating practices”. Thus, in the contemporary context, we cannot talk about women or men without using the terms ‘women’ and ‘men’. For some writers this is vital for stabilizing the ground on which to organize a feminist politics that challenges misogyny and discrimination against women (Braidotti, 1994; Jeffreys, 2003). Indeed Spivak’s (1988) notion of ‘strategic essentialism’ argues for the deployment of an essence of, say, gender identity to make unifying claims about the category of women and female subjectivity, while also questioning whether it is an essence at all. Yet, as Butler (1999) also insists, this kind of operational essentialism is problematic as it fails to account for the politics involved in “who gets to make the designation [of woman] and in the name of whom” (1999, p. 325). So she is not against the use of terms that express categories per se, but rather opposes using such categories as implying – even provisionally - a fixed and universal identity. Instead each needs to be understood as an open, multiple, heterogeneous and unstable term that includes its own instabilities. Butler’s (1999, p. 44) goal is to mobilize a subversive proliferation of “those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity” – insodoing, she suggests, they can be mobilized against themselves. Again then we return to her observation that gender does not mean the terms ‘woman’ or ‘man’, since it is not an identity or a categorical term, but a power apparatus that constitutes these identities and terms as possible and legible.

In order to provide a final bridge into our concluding reflections on que(e)rying empirical research in organizations, we now turn our attention to the dynamic between the concept of performativity and the body, at least as it is articulated in queer theory and in Butler's work more specifically.

Performativity and the body

Having problematized two modes of operationalizing gender as a cultural mark and within an additive model, it is useful to reiterate the theoretical resources we suggest can help organization studies researchers interested in gender and work to avoid the essentialist traps discussed above. As we argue above, Butler (1999, 1993a, 1993b) insists that performativity is not a singular and deliberate act of the subject: it consists of power relations that operate through discourse and make possible the existence of the subject *qua* subject. For instance, to declare a man 'heterosexual' is not a neutral act of description, but a performative statement that interpellates the subject as such. It does not have its foundations in some*one*. Butler's notion of performativity is premised on her conviction that gender is a corporeal style, an act as it were, which "is both intentional and performative, where "performative" suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (1999, p. 177). Crucially, performativity "cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject" (Butler, 1993b, p. 95 - emphasis in original). Understood as such, Butler (1993b) emphasizes that subject positions are continually evoked through stylized acts of repetition, and it is through acts of repetition that gender becomes ritualized, the effects of which make it appear natural. As such, she is at pains to point out that performativity is not reducible to performance because the latter presupposes the existence of a 'performer' or subject while performativity contests the notion of a preformed subject (*ibid.*). Thus gender is performative because it is the effect of a regularized repetition of norms in which "genders are divided and hierarchized *under constraint*" (1993a, p. 21 - emphasis in original). The constraints expressed by beliefs, knowledges, taboos, prohibitions, rewards and punishments operate in the ritualized repetition of norms that simultaneously (re)construct and deconstruct gender.

So, as we have established, for Butler (1993a, 1999) gender norms work through the heterosexual matrix, soliciting in us the embodiment of the idealized characteristics of masculinity and femininity. There is nothing natural in the body because the body is first and foremost a cultural product (Viteritti, 2013) and gender is an embodied cultural process (Swan, 2010). We are (largely) compelled to perform according to the norm-laden performativities required of us within a specific space and time. The body becomes articulable as a ‘knowable’, intelligible body within the terms of those norms. Butler (1999, p. 146 - emphasis in original) also suggests that the fact that “penis, vagina, breasts and so forth, are *named* sexual parts is both a restriction of the erogenous body to those parts and a fragmentation of the body as a whole”. Preciado (2002) agrees that the production of sexual differences divides the body into parts, attributing sexual significance to some parts and not to others. Here Butler and Preciado borrow from Foucault’s (1988, p. 201) argument that “sexuality as such, in the body, has a preponderant place, the sexual organ isn't like a hand, hair, or a nose”. However, as Butler also argues in an interview with Vicki Kirby (2006, p. 145), “discourse cannot fully ‘capture’ the body, and the body cannot fully elude discourse”. Many bodies are outside of the legible binary opposition man/woman or masculine/feminine. Nonetheless, resistance has a clear and present price and bodies that do not ‘adjust’ according to this intelligibility, as we have already implied, are deemed weird, ugly, even monstrous; for example, abject ‘intersex’ or ‘trans’ bodies (Butler, 1993b). So on the one hand gender intelligibility enables us to recognize bodily characteristics related to the production of the ‘true’ man and woman (Knights and Tullberg, 2011), but it is also a troubling process because we “embody so many paradoxes about what we have in common and what separates us; about our sense of self and our recognition of others” (Weeks, 1995, p. 86).

In pursuing this theorization of the body, one important question arises: how might we que(e)ry empirical research in organization studies so as to move beyond any traps promoted by the notion of the mark of a cultural gender over a pre-discursive body and/ or the additive model of identity, and to foreground processes of gender performativity? Our final section responds to this question, providing organization studies researchers with some ideas of how to accomplish this.

Que(e)rying empirical research in organization studies

As we have illustrated by unpacking our own research, it is not easy to escape the powerful temptations promoted by notions of a pre-discursive body and the additive model of identity. Here we sketch some routes which might assist in breaking both logics when conducting empirical research on gender, work and organization. These are grounded in carefully "attending to how people construct their selves" (King and Cronin, 2010, p. 95), focusing on processes of gender (re)construction and remembering to evidence the processes by which gender is deconstructed, thus consciously emphasizing gender instabilities and considering gender as a performative process of identification in the Butlerian sense. Remembering that Butler does not disavow categorical terms such as 'woman' or 'man' in and of themselves, but rather any deployment of these categories which reproduces them as stable and solid, we need to understand each category as an open, multiple, heterogeneous and unstable term that includes its own instabilities. Interpellating potential participants as one thing or the other – male, female, gay, lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual, trans etc. – is as she suggests unavoidable in 'the contemporary field of power', but what matters is to explore relations between gender and the body in the moment and the context studied. This requires that our empirical dialogues explicitly open up how our participants inhabit (and equally do not) heteronormativity in their speech, their actions, their demeanour, their appearance, their gestures, their desires, their very materiality, in dynamic and complex ways.

In this regard, we draw on examples that mobilize Butler to that end. For instance, sociologists King and Cronin (2010) call on her work in shaping their use of membership categorization analysis to "examine how heteronormative assumptions about ageing and sexuality are reproduced, challenged and transgressed in the narrative accounts of people who identify themselves as older lesbian, gay and bisexual adults" (p. 92). They focus on the narrative offered by a '73 year old' 'gay man' called Ernest in response to the question "We all use different terms to describe our sexuality so it would be helpful for me if you could tell me how you describe your sexual identity?" (*ibid.*). King and Cronin analyse the twists and turns in Ernest's response to suggest that he makes use of the membership categorization device 'sexuality' to present himself as a gay man, but a man first and foremost. Ernest goes on to say that the only difference between him and an 'ordinary man' is that he has sex with other men. He then names the things he has never done which he implicitly categorizes as 'typically gay', including entering into a civil partnership. Significantly, Ernest's later responses also perform "categorisation work" by distancing himself from the category 'older': he says 'older people' do things that are "not really my scene" like "chatting about the old days" (*ibid.*, p. 94). He further refuses membership of this social category by saying the voluntary work he does with older people means he needs to listen and be helpful to them.

This sort of analysis is valuable for organization studies researchers interested in gender and sexuality because it necessarily begins with particular sorts of questions worded something like 'We all use different terms to describe ourselves so it would be helpful for me if you could tell me how you describe your sex/ gender/ sexuality' or 'Tell me what being a woman/ being feminine/ being a lesbian means to you?'. And, in order to avoid performatively constituting the fallacy/phallusy that it is only women who are gendered, an important if perhaps more challenging alternative would be 'Tell me what being a man/ being masculine/ being a heterosexual means to you?'. We suggest, following King and Cronin's Butlerian approach, that this opens up categories such as male, female, gay, lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual, trans, etc. As Weston (1998, pp. 145-146) writes, approaching empirical work this way foregrounds what she calls 'street theorizing' as "a wellspring of explanatory devices and theoretical strategies in its own right", as opposed to understanding our data as raw and "TBE – to be explained" via a queer theoretical lens. These categories become "never-quite-known (or knowable) … not a stable, bounded person or a thing but a category of convenience for describing a process of constant reworlding" (Weston, 2009, p. 144).

Of course we are by no means 'free' and 'outside' of gender norms ourselves. As organization studies researchers inclined toward queer theory, then, our exchanges with participants – in any call we send out for recruitment purposes, and at the very least at the start of each formal data gathering 'episode' – might fruitfully begin by responding to these questions ourselves. Waitt's reflections on his research project 'Home and Away' provide an instructive example. He often spent considerable time in each interview explaining to his respondents what being a 'gay man' means to him and how he has experienced home, travel and migration (in Gorman-Murray *et al*., 2010). As a result, and although his participants all identified as non-heterosexual, none therefore assumed they necessarily shared something with Waitt on this basis. After all, as he points out, otherwise his recruitment strategy ran the risk of "essentialising non-heteronormative identities, setting aside the multiple intersections of sexuality with class, gender, age, and so on, that cohere around *any* individual" (Gorman-Murray *et al*., 2010, p. 103 – our emphasis). Equally, Gormann-Murray writes that, although the shared experience of marginality in his project on gay and lesbian home-making often created "richly textured conversations" (*ibid.*, p. 106) given his own identification as a gay man, the least informative interviews were those where he interviewed people apparently 'most like himself', except that they were less invested in homemaking. Also operating in a Butlerian vein, Gormann-Murray suggests it is crucial not to assume the stability of either sameness or difference in such exchanges. This is something which Nash, a self-identified lesbian discussing her research with transmen, echoes in her insistence that we all bring 'baggage' to research projects - so we need to remember that relations between interviewer and participant are "perpetually unstable" (2010, p. 141) as a result. Weston's essay 'The Virtual Anthropologist' is also very persuasive on this point; indeed at one point she writes "Studying "one's own" is no more a matter of natural affinity than nativity is the consequence of birth" (1998, p. 197). The reverse, we should add, is also true.

Proceeding this way, organization studies scholars may understand how gender and the body are characterized by empirical fluidity, movement, action, instability and flow from the outset of the research process. The examples above, we suggest, disrupt the possibility of deterministic relations being implicitly assumed between body, sex and gender where gender is understood as a cultural mark or a base identity layered over by other identities – perhaps especially where 'undoing' gender seems trivial or to lack any significant social impact. It is, we suggest, in the smallest of fissures in the doing of gender just as in more significant schisms that we come to understand better how it is undone. Encouragingly, there are progressive signs of this happening within organizational research on gender and sexuality. For example, Muhr and Sullivan (2013, p. 420) point out that queer theory has sought both to document and exceed the power of the heterosexual matrix "mainly by investigating bodies that transgress [it] … such as LGBT people". They go on, drawing on Butler's notion of performativity and the body, to suggest of their own study of a transgender leader that "We realize that studying bodies that transgress the matrix – even for the purpose of illuminating the fluidity of gendered identities – also draws upon and reifies the matrix". On the basis of their analysis, Muhr and Sullivan propose a Butlerian process of queering - of leadership specifically - which allows for the recognition that gender is always and already performative, discursively legible to a greater or lesser degree depending on the classification of body which performs it.

Our point here is similar, to call for a focus on the least visible of transgressions to the matrix in our empirical work as well as those that are more tangible. Muhr and Sullivan (2013, p. 426) suggest, for example, that transgender leader Claire, the focus of their study, sometimes does not have enough time in the mornings before work to do her make-up, a process that takes between 30 and 45 minutes. They argue that when this happens Claire's "body seems against her as it fails to uphold the stereotypical images of a woman" (*ibid.*, p. 425) and that her team finds these instances disconcerting. Muhr and Sullivan also point out that Claire's biologically female employees actually wear much less make up than she does but this is deemed less strange because of their biology. It is these small fissures in gender performativity which perhaps deserve as much empirical attention as the more significant breach exemplified when Claire 'fails' to 'drag up' sufficiently well in the mornings, so that we can explore how, when and why they take place, and redirect attention to performativity as not only continual but necessarily incomplete *no matter what kind of body does the performing.*

So, and given that gender is constructed, reconstructed and deconstructed, often simultaneously by the same body in the same time and place, we need to focus on how processes of gender (dis)identification occur. If gender identities are established by a process of identification and not by a pre-discursive body, people that 'have' a penis, say, can and do identify themselves as feminine, masculine or another sort of identity outside of the intelligibility of the heterosexual matrix. We need to comprehend how bodies become (un)intelligible in the terms of the norms operating within specific situations and which compel certain types of citations. This analysis should avoid foregrounding the genital anatomy of the body, remembering that norms "usually remain implicit, difficult to read, discernible most clearly and dramatically in the effects that they produce" (Butler, 2004, p. 41). Working in this way, our que(e)rying of empirical research within organization studies outlines how the performative character of gender can be underlined and therefore resignified in our empirical work. As Nash suggests, "Looking 'queerly' for the non-conformative … sheds light on the possibilities and potentialities for lives lived in incongruent and conflicting relationships with normative systems of meaning – neither within nor without – but as a form of fluidity; a mobile instability in experiences, behaviours and practices of the self" (2010, p. 132).

In conclusion, we propose that que(e)rying empirical research in organization studies could usefully attend more closely to how our participants (and we ourselves) work with the categories 'men' and 'women' (and/ or 'masculine', 'feminine', 'heterosexual', 'gay', 'lesbian', 'bisexual' etcetera), who is considered and considers themselves to be 'men' and 'women' in a particular time and place, how these 'men' and ‘women’ identify themselves as such, how the categories ‘men’ and ‘women’ are (re)constructed and deconstructed through performative acts, and what the implications are. In so doing, organization studies researchers have the opportunity to depart from understandings of categories of ‘men’ and ‘women’ which risk leaving them somewhat unscathed, unproblematic, solidified and predicated on the biological body, to focus better both on how gender is constructed *and* de/reconstructed. As Butler (1999, p. 22) says, the first premise of an empirical study inspired by queer theory is to consider gender as an “open coalition [… which] will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purpose at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure”. Instead of coming to the empirical field with implicit (pre)conceptions whereby sex and gender alike are predicated on the ‘natural’ body’ and, where disjunctures exist, understanding these as necessarily ‘trans’ or ‘queer’ categories in and of themselves, we might instead seek to understand how these identities are constructed and re/deconstructed “within and between embodiment, place, and practice” (Halberstam, 2005, p. 5).

Returning to the cave-dwelling insect Neotrogla is pertinent here, not least because it reminds us of the perils involved in categorizing bodies that are not immediately intelligible. We see a certain anthropomorphism in Yoshizawa *et al.*’s (2014) account because they seem to locate sex, not in Neotrogla’s organs, but in the sperm (produced by the male) and the egg (produced by the female). This example underscores the possibilities for organization studies scholars to encounter unintelligible bodies during the research process which disrupt the heternormative body-sex-gender nexus, as well as the temptation among scientists to (re)fix the bodies they study in order to make them intelligible within familiar categories (Butler, 1999, 2004). The example of Neotrogla might encourage organization studies scholars to proceed, to borrow Weston’s words (1998, p. 155), “with the understanding that theory is always and already implicit in [our] documentation”. In so doing, we might hope to treat the body-sex-gender nexus as incomplete, always in state of becoming, in order to allow queerer notions of this dynamic to emerge within our empirical research.

Notes

1. Butler (1993b) actually departed from the concept of the heterosexual matrix in *Bodies That Matter*, to suggest that it is overly totalizing. In a 1993 interview, she says that "The heterosexual matrix became a kind of totalising symbolic, and that's why I changed the term in *Bodies That Matter* to heterosexual *hegemony*. This opens the possibility that this is a matrix which is open to rearticulation, which has a kind of malleability." (Butler *et al*., 1994, p. 119 - emphasis in original). However, we retain the term here because of its widespread uptake in other scholarship and because we do not read it as by definition overly totalizing, as section 5 ('Performativity and the body') explains.

2. This term of course is not Butler's formulation.

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