

## Un/doing Chrononormativity:

### Negotiating Ageing, Gender and Sexuality in Organizational Life

#### Abstract

This paper is based on a series of ‘anti-narrative’ interviews designed to explore the ways in which lived experiences of age, gender and sexuality are negotiated and narrated within organizations in later life. It draws on Judith Butler’s performative ontology of gender, particularly her account of the ways in which the desire for recognition is shaped by heteronormativity, considering its implications for how we study ageing and organizations. In doing so, the paper develops a critique of the impact of heteronormative life course expectations on the negotiation of viable subjectivity within organizational settings. Focusing on the ways in which ‘chrononormativity’ shapes the lived experiences of ageing within organizations, at the same time as constituting an organizing process in itself, the paper draws on Butler’s concept of ‘un/doing’ in its analysis of the simultaneously affirming and negating organizational experiences of older self-identifying LGBT people. The paper concludes by emphasizing the theoretical potential of a performative ontology of ageing, gender and sexuality for organization studies, as well as the methodological insights to be derived from an ‘anti-narrative’ approach to organizational research, arguing for the need to develop a more inclusive politics of ageing within both organizational practice and research.

## **Introduction**

If some part of you already realizes you're an outcast ... you're always busy negotiating a line ... You're always busy. You want to belong, you want to be yourself ... and of course you want affection and intimacy.

(Interview with Chris, September 2012)

This article examines the ways in which gender, sexuality and ageing interrelate in the organizational experiences of individuals 'who do not subscribe to heteronormative logics of desire' (Taylor, 2010, p. 896). Taylor (2010) outlines how growing older gay involves the narration and negotiation of 'new forms of relationality and new identities' (p. 894), a theme we explore here through a series of in-depth interviews focusing on lived experiences of ageing, sexuality and gender as these interrelated dimensions of identity shape and are shaped by the dynamics of work and organization.

While a growing body of research on queer scenes, cultures and networks has emerged within sociology (Casey, 2004; Driver, 2008), and age has become an important theme in the work and organization studies literature (Author A; Ainsworth and Hardy, 2008, 2009; Duncan and Loretto, 2004), very broadly speaking the former has tended to focus mainly on youth while the latter has neglected sexuality, so that lived experiences of the inter-relationship between gender, sexuality and ageing within work and organizational settings remain under-researched. Such experiences are not only scripted by heteronormativity, prescribed conditions that assume heterosexual and gender normative coupling, caring and occupational expectations, but are also imbued with what Freeman (2010: xxiii) terms 'chrononormativity': the

‘interlocking temporal schemes necessary for genealogies of descent and for the mundane workings of everyday life’. Chrononormativity presents a fruitful means of exploring the temporal orders inscribed in organizational life which produce assumed and expected heteronormative trajectories that may include (but are not exclusive to) ideas about the ‘right’ time’ for particular life stages surrounding partnering, parenting and caring vis-à-vis career progression, promotions and flexible working. To explore further what chrononormative conditions affect organizational lives, we turn to conceptual and theoretical insights from Butler’s (1988, 1993, 2000a, 2000b, 2004, 2005) writing, particularly her performative ontology of gender and her account of the heteronormative organization of the desire for recognition to ask a number of questions. First, how are age, gender and sexuality simultaneously experienced, understood and ‘managed’ within and through organizations? What are the conditions and limits of cultural intelligibility, and employability, in this respect, and how are these understood and interpellated? Second, what are the organizational implications of individuals violating chrononormative life course expectations, and in what ways do such violations constitute an ‘undoing’ in Butler’s (2004) terms? Finally, where might a performative ontology of age(ing) within organizations and a recognition based critique of chrononormativity lead us, and what does this approach imply conceptually for our theoretical and methodological understanding of lived experiences of sexuality, ageing and gender at work?

Our discussion of these questions begins with an initial review of relevant work on ageing, gender and sexuality, focusing particularly on research exploring ageing gay and lesbian sexualities in the workplace. Here, we identify the gaps in current understanding and unanswered questions emerging from earlier work that our own

study seeks to address, teasing out opportunities to advance both our conceptual and empirical understanding, as well acknowledging the ways in which lived experiences of ageing, gender and sexuality have been understood theoretically. Following on from this review, we consider Butler's (1988, 1993, 2000a, 2004) writing on gender performativity, the heterosexual matrix and the conditions shaping the conferment or denial of recognition, outlining the performative perspective that we adopt in our own account of how gender, age and sexuality interact. Here we connect Butler's concept of the heterosexual matrix to Freeman's (2010) notion of chrononormativity, arguing that the latter constitutes the temporal corollary of the former. We argue that, in practice, this means that complying with the life course expectations associated with the heterosexual matrix constitutes the condition of viable subjectivity upon which the conferral of recognition within organizational settings depends. Here we use the term 'life course' to encapsulate the dynamic interplay between individual biographies and their social, historical and organizational context, extending insights from Hockey and James (2003) by acknowledging that negotiating the life course is undertaken not simply as a social but an ontological imperative.

We then outline and evaluate the methodological approach that we took to studying the lived experiences of older workers who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans- (henceforth referred to as LGBT) understanding these as negotiated and narrated through various work identities, occupational roles and organizational settings within the UK, where we conducted our study. Next, we discuss each of the themes that emerged from their accounts, focusing on the dynamics of desire and recognition as these are experienced through affirming performances and negating experiences, and framing these through the analytical lenses of performativity,

chrononormativity and recognition outlined at the outset of the paper. We conclude by mapping out the analytical potential of the recognition-based performative ontology and anti-narrative methodology underpinning our approach for the study of lived experiences of ageing, gender and sexuality within work organizations. We do so by arguing that, while the ageing process provides older LGBT workers with an opportunity to engage in relatively affirmative performances characterized by a degree of freedom from the constraints of a heteronormative life course, this freedom was experienced as largely conditional upon the successful performance of gender, sexuality and ageing. It was also dependent upon both material accumulation through the occupation of comparatively privileged positions in terms of social class and capital, and the related capacity to sustain sexual, age and gender performances that would be accorded social recognition. In practice, this means that chrononormativity as the normative assumptions associated with a heterosexual life course serves to effectively ‘undo’ older LGBT workers in Butler’s terms, negating their complex lived experiences, requiring them to constantly negotiate carefully narrated identities, as Chris evokes in the opening quotation.

Our contribution to the special issue and to the field of organization studies more generally is broadly threefold. Empirically, we expose and problematize the way in which heteronormative assumptions enable and constrain the lived experiences of LGBT sexualities, ageing and gender at work. Theoretically, we develop Butler’s (1988, 2000a) performative ontology and particularly her concept of the ‘heterosexual matrix’ and her recognition-based critique of the conditions governing viable subjectivity, arguing that her analysis provides an important lens through which to ‘undo’ the ontological assumptions which belie current orthodoxies surrounding the

life course as an organizational phenomenon. In doing so, we extend some of the inroads that Butler's work has already made into organization studies in recent years (Author C; Harding et al., 2011, 2013; Hodgson, 2005; Hancock and Tyler, 2007; Kelan, 2010; Kenny, 2010, 2012; Parker, 2002; Roberts, 2005; Tyler and Cohen, 2008). We do so specifically by exploring the potential contribution it might make to a critical understanding of (i) how the heteronormative life course is experienced in and through workplace settings, and (ii) how organizational selves are narrated through the heteronormative life course as a social process of organization. Addressing this methodologically, we develop an approach we have termed 'anti-narrative' interviewing designed to provide a reflexive space through which the narration of organizational selves might be undone, therefore developing the methodological implications of Butler's performative ontology and opening up its potential for organizational research. In our theoretical analysis of the data, we argue that, in order to understand the dynamics of the desire for recognition underpinning the work experiences of LGBT people as they grow older, organization studies needs to consider the multiple performativities that shape the narration of seemingly coherent organizational subjectivities. In this paper we map out a series of possible conceptual, theoretical and methodological avenues for doing so.

### **Ageing, gender and sexuality: A performative perspective**

Despite the increasing interest in age-based perceptions and practices at work, understanding the complexity of ageing, and the ways in which it intersects with other aspects of identity within an organizational setting is still in its embryonic stages. Studies have begun to identify the key organizational discourses that influence how 'older workers' are conceptualized through concepts such as enterprise, flexibility or

health (Ainsworth, 2002; Ainsworth and Hardy, 2008; 2009), demonstrating how such tropes may lead to their systematic marginalization through limiting the range of successful subject positions that are available to older workers within organizational settings (Author A; Rudman and Molke, 2009). In particular, analyses have endeavored to understand the ways that gendered assumptions decrease an individual's ability to successfully negotiate occupational selves in relation to age (Duncan and Loretto, 2004; Handy and Davy, 2007), or alternatively how individuals challenge perceptions that appropriate behaviour should be governed by chronological age and life stage (Author A; Irni, 2009). Yet despite evidence that gendered ageing is experienced and informed *inter alia* by social scripts surrounding other classifications such as social class, ethnicity or occupation (Arber and Ginn, 1993; Moore, 2009; Radl, 2012), current debates have not yet been extended to explore sexuality and its age-d effects within organizational settings. Hence, for the most part, sexuality remains neglected within ageing studies (see for notable exceptions Averett et al, 2012; Cronin and King, 2010; Heaphy, 2007; Fredriksen-Goldsen et al, 2009; Leonard et al, 2013), and in research on ageing within work and organization studies in particular.

This neglect of sexuality within the ageing and organization studies literature is also mirrored within the sociological literature on sexuality. This tends to be driven by a preoccupation with youth, leisure and consumer cultures rather than ageing and work as thematic concerns, in contrast with organization studies literature on sexuality and work, which tends not to examine intersections between sexuality and other aspects of identity such as ageing. In Fleming's (2007) analysis of the dynamics of power and control shaping organizational experiences of sexuality, for instance, overt displays of

non-normative sexualities were celebrated, encouraged and merged with a co-opted youth culture in the organizational setting he studied, yet ageing remains an undeveloped theme within his analysis. Indeed, the ways in which older workers experience sexuality is under-researched more broadly. Despite three decades of organizational research on LGBT sexualities (Bowring and Brewis, 2009; Clair et al., 2005; Hall, 1986; Levine, 1979; Ward and Winstanley, 2003; Woods and Lucas, 1993), ageing remains a silent theme. Taken together, this body of scholarship exposes the heteronormativity of organizational life and its consequences for those who identify as LGBT, yet neglects the ways in which heteronormativity and ageing are negotiated and experienced. Heteronormativity, understood here as the norms related to gender and sexuality that (re)produce power relations of compulsory heterosexuality, continues to ascribe heterosexuality a normative and privileged status by reinforcing a heterosexual/homosexual binary. Viewed as a regulatory regime that structures many facets of everyday organizational life, the heterosexual/homosexual binary supports the institutionalization of heteronormativity that risks excluding, stigmatizing and marginalizing individuals whose sexualities do not conform to these norms (Skidmore, 2004).

With this in mind, we argue that whilst largely absent from mainstream ageing studies, sexuality operates as an important heuristic device to uncover the heteronormativity within ageing studies. Relating this to age, paradigms surrounding the life course are imbued with expectations relating to monogamy, family, and inheritance. Such 'chrononormativity', as Freeman (2010) describes it, is molded by expectations surrounding bodily performativity and potential, particularly in terms of reproduction. Within working life, this chrononormativity emerges in the political

economy and has implications for LGBT people surrounding taxation benefits, inheritance and pension rights, as well as more general concerns in terms of family care structures as retirement age increases (EHRC, 2010). This political chrononormativity results in LGBT sexualities being overlooked by policy makers and service providers (Heaphy, 2007; Heaphy and Yip, 2006; Heaphy et al., 2004). While an application of chrononormativity to understanding discrimination and disadvantage at the level of social structure has been particularly important, others have highlighted the value of focusing more on lived experiences of non-normative sexualities throughout the life course. For example, research has pointed to chrononormative consequences in lesbian women's accounts of the sexual and gendered dynamics of in/visibility (Averett et al., 2011; Jones and Nystrom, 2002; Phillips and Marks, 2008) while research on older men reveals how gay cultures may fetishize notions of youthfulness, positioning age as an aesthetic phenomenon (Jones and Pugh, 2005; Slevin and Linneman, 2010). Despite the insights derived from this body of literature, scholars have concentrated disproportionately on gay men's experiences to the detriment of other sexualities, in particular, the experiences of those who identify as bi and trans-sexual (for a notable exception, see Schilt and Connell, 2007). Indeed as Thanem (2011) and Author B have argued respectively, organizational research tends to replicate the trans- or bi-phobia found within organizational life so that LGBT experience is arguably homogenized and regarded as a fixed and stable point of identification throughout the life course, including the working life course.

This critique of homogenization requires us to develop an approach to empirical research and theoretical analysis that is capable of appreciating the ways in which

sexuality, ageing and other aspects of identity inter-relate dynamically and diachronically. With this in mind, we take as our starting point the idea put forward by Butler (2000a) that sexual and gender identities are not static and universal in the meanings they hold for subjects, a theme we examine here with particular reference to a performative understanding of ageing, through developing insights from Butler's critique of the heteronormative conditioning of subjectivity.

Ontologically, Butler's (1988, 2000a) notion of performativity represents a radical challenge to the enduring preoccupation with a coherent, stable subject emphasizing instead a self that can be summarized as 'improvisational, discontinuous and processual, constituted by repetitive and stylized acts' (Meyer, 1993: 2-3). In Butler's (1988, 1993, 2000a) writing, this performative ontology 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' (Butler, 1990, p. 177, original emphasis). Through acts of repetition and recitation, gender becomes ritualized, the effects of which make it appear natural. Arguing that 'this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject' (Butler, 1993, p. 95, original emphasis), Butler emphasizes that subject positions are continually evoked through stylized acts of repetition, including we would argue, those compelled by chrononormativity through mundane acts of gesture and inflection.

In Butler's account, if performed in accordance with the norms of the heterosexual matrix, these acts of recitation result in the attribution of viable subjectivity. Compelling the performance of normative acts of recitation is an underlying desire for

recognition of oneself as a culturally intelligible, viable subject, a fundamental theme recurring in Butler's (2004, 2005) writing based on insights from Jessica Benjamin's analysis of psychic longing (Butler, 2000b), and particularly Hegel's narration of the master/slave dialectic (see Hancock and Tyler, 2007). For Butler (1993, p. 115), subjectivity in this respect is always a process of undoing through which, as she puts it, 'the subject produces its coherence at the cost of its own complexity'. What this suggests is that for LGBT people, viable subjectivity requires conforming to normative expectations associated with the heterosexual life course as they grow older. Yet the role played by organizations in compelling or constraining convincing performances in this respect remains under-researched, as does the impact of what Butler calls the 'heterosexual matrix' on intersections of gender, ageing and sexuality within organizational settings.

In her analysis of the conditions that compel particular performances and in doing so, constrain others, Butler uses the term 'heterosexual matrix' to make conceptual sense of what she describes as 'a self-supporting signifying economy that wields power in the marking off of what can and cannot be thought within the terms of cultural intelligibility'<sup>i</sup> (2000a, pp. 99-100). Butler suggests that the heterosexual matrix, sustained through the heteronormativity outlined above, therefore enables certain subjectivities at the same time as foreclosing and disavowing others. In other words, it configures intelligible or viable subjects, those that are produced 'as a consequence of recognition according to prevailing social norms' (Butler, 2004, p. 3). In practice, this organizes gender, sexuality, ageing and, as we argue below, the intersections between these interrelated aspects of identity, according to the terms of the heterosexual matrix. Within organizational settings this suggests that to be accorded the status of

viable subjectivity requires a performance that complies with assumptions underpinning chrononormativity, and the heteronormative working life course. Yet as noted above, we currently know little about the lived experience of this process as the impact of the heterosexual matrix on the organizational lives of older LGBT people remains notably under-researched within organization studies.

### **Studying intersections of gender, sexuality and ageing: An anti-narrative approach**

Thinking through the methodological possibilities of this performative, recognition-based perspective for studying how sexuality, ageing and gender performances are negotiated and experienced within and through organizations was one of the aims of our study. Drawing on insights from Butler's writing outlined above, our approach to the research sought to explore the reflexive potential of an anti-narrative methodology, one that would encourage critical reflection on our participants' experiences of performing subject positions compelled by the working life course expectations associated with chrononormativity. This 'anti-narrative' approach therefore sought to disrupt the apparent linearity, stability and coherence of organizational performances. At the same time, it encouraged participants to reflect on their own subjectivity through the conditions of organizational viability; in practice, opening up a methodological space within which participants could reflect on the tensions, conflicts and compromises involved in becoming and maintaining acceptability at work through the narration of seemingly coherent, viable selves. In this sense, our aim was to explore their performativities and the ways in which performativity shapes and is shaped by heteronormative assumptions about the

working life course upon which the conferral of viable, organizational subjectivity depends.

We were inspired by Stephenson's (2005, p. 33) use of 'memory-work' as an analytical map for 'undoing' linearity in Butler's terms, which orientates towards 'undoing the subject of linear, causal, biographical narratives and a notion of the subject as collectively constituted'. Specifically, our concern was to develop a methodology that would avoid simply re-presenting the versions of organizational 'reality' that we were trying to disrupt, precisely in order to understand their performativity. As Stephenson (2005, p. 34, emphasis added) argues,

To the extent that *biographical and autobiographical accounts* offer linear, causal explanations of individuals as the inevitable products of their past experiences ... they *tend to occlude the social processes we want to open and interrogate*.

While studies exploring the multifaceted aspects of identity in an organizational setting often draw on traditional methods including interviews and participation observation (Alvesson et al., 2008), Denis (2008) suggests that research methodologies must take into account the intersectional dynamics of various elements of the self *within* the design of both data collection and analysis. This is a particularly important consideration when seeking to avoid normative social scripts that are often conveniently drawn upon in research interactions, whether they be binary (work/non-work), chronological (age) or categorical (straight, bisexual, gay). To address this, we devised an interview-based methodology that aimed to disrupt chronological

narratives and categorical thinking. Underlying this was a methodology designed to disrupt coherence and tease out overlaps, rather than work within and through apparently discrete categories of identity.

To negotiate access to participants, we used a variety of sampling techniques, including advertisements of older LGBT websites and organizations that support older individuals, eventually making contact with eight people who agreed to be part of the study. The recruitment process involved sending out further details of the study to potential participants which not only served as a tool to comply with institutional ethics governance, but invariably set parameters on our sample by stating we were 'looking to interview men and women over the age of 40 who currently work full or part-time and self-identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual'. While the qualifier of 'over 40' differs from chronological definitions of older workers established within the ageing literature as over 45, 50 or 55 years old (see for examples, Irni, 2009 and Moore 2009), these definitions tend to reflect heteronormative assumptions regarding cultural perceptions of ageing. In contrast, our approach strove to be sensitive to research and lived experiences indicating that particularly within gay cultures being 'older' tends to be experienced and perceived at a chronologically younger age (Heaphy, 2007; Slevin and Linneman, 2010). In keeping with this inclusive ethos, all of those interested were invited to take part, resulting in a final sample of 5 gay men, 2 lesbian women and 1 male-female transsexual.

Because the sample was relatively self-selecting in this respect, our participants tended to be quite reflective, analytical people and reflected a higher than average level of cultural capital, educational attainment and in several cases, workplace

experiences that were either particularly negative or conducive to being ‘open’ about their sexuality. However, it would be an over-simplification either to over-homogenize our participants’ backgrounds in this respect, or to attribute the key themes that emerged from our interviews simply to the composition of the sample; although many of our participants were relatively financially secure for instance, all of them discussed the various difficulties they had experienced throughout their lives negotiating a viable sense of self. To this extent our participants may be reflexively disposed due to often experiencing what McNay (1999, p. 111) calls ‘a distancing of the subject with constitutive structures’ in their everyday lives; in other words, a recurring sense of disjuncture between their sense of self and normative social and organizational expectations.

Attempting to tease out their experiences, we undertook a series of in-depth interviews and email correspondences with each of the eight participants using a broad schedule that sought to frame the interview as a reflexive moment designed to disrupt or ‘make trouble’ to use Butler’s (2000a) terms, with workplace narratives and the chrononormative compulsions by which they are underpinned. In pursuit of our anti-narrative<sup>ii</sup> approach, we adapted a drawing-based method we had only previously encountered in Wallman’s (2011) anthropological study of local network effects, and in Longhurst’s (2001) use of ‘symbolic maps’ in her study of women’s negotiation of their pregnant bodies in public places. We began by conducting a visually-led interaction, asking participants to draw and then talk through an adaptation of Venn diagrams traditionally used to illustrate connective sets<sup>iii</sup>. These were not intended to contribute to our ‘data’ as such, but rather to provide a reflexive way of exploring the tacit and elusive connectivities that are often naturalized in everyday experience or

inadvertently categorized as fixed and discrete in research design (see Fournier, 2002 for a discussion). In this respect, the diagrams also provided a material artifact that allowed the discussion to focus on participants' own experiences and perceptions of the dynamics of age, gender and sexuality, and often resulted in participants focusing on experiences of what Byrne (2006: 48) refers to as accounts of 'rupture' where individuals consciously negotiated between, across and against different social identifiers. We used these drawings as well as a broad interview schedule to guide subsequent discussion in the interviews we undertook, although each of the three researchers were very flexible in how we used the interview schedule, allowing the participants to lead the discussion. Our schedule was based on the research questions outlined in the introduction, and encouraged participants to (i) discuss their respective Venn diagrams, focusing on overlaps, connections, contradictions and oppositions; (ii) talk about their experiences of work, both now, in the past and in the future; (iii) reflect on how their experiences have changed, or remained the same, over time, and in different settings, and (iv) discuss how their working lives, and sense of self, are lived and experienced as they grow older. We made no attempt to define or categorize any temporal or life course 'markers' during the interviews, but allowed participants to articulate their own views and experiences in ways that made sense to themselves. In this respect, our anti-narrative approach to conducting the interviews was designed to reflect on, and 'undo' semblances of coherence. To some extent this was similar to the approach adopted by Coupland (2001) in so far as participants were asked to talk about work in general in order to encourage a reflexive exploration of the negotiations and intersections that characterized their organizational performances, rather than imposing identity-specific questions upon them.

Most of the interviews took place either in our, or the participants', own homes; they were all digitally recorded, and were between one and three hours in duration. Once these interviews had been transcribed and subject to a first level thematic analysis, we presented our interpretations of emergent findings from each interview back to the respective participants, building a dialogic methodology designed to be both collective (Brannan, 2011) and inter-subjective (Cunliffe, 2003), within which data collection and analysis formed part of a reflexive process. This meant that, in a similar way to Stephenson (2005), our analysis proceeded by trying to denaturalize the accounts we were given. In particular, we avoided reading each account as part of a coherent narration of an individual biography. Instead, we understood each interview as a 'snapshot' of the social processes through which individual selves are constituted as particular kinds of subjects, and through which the complexities of lived experience are narrated into semblances of coherence.

Data analysis was inspired by our interest in thinking through the methodological potential of Butler's performative ontology for exploring intersections between ageing, gender and sexualities. Rather than following patterns of intersectional analysis that focus either on levels of overlapping (see for instance, Winker and Degele, 2011) or boundary or categorical work (McCall, 2005), we sought to develop an analytical strategy which orbited around the concept of anti-narrative as a methodological opportunity for critical reflexivity. Following Riach (2009, pages 359 and 356) and building on Alvesson (2003), our aim in this sense was to work towards a more collaborative, inter-subjective understanding of reflexivity through 'an interrogation of our own frameworks of knowing' (Riach, 2009, p. 359). This recognizes the extent to which reflexivity is 'situated and enacted' by all parties

involved in the research process, helping to identify some of the ways in which different subject positions are upheld by all participants. In methodological terms, the analytical process involved each researcher interrogating the processes of objectification we undertook as part of the analysis, subjecting our own and each other's assumptions to reflexive critique. This allowed us to develop and sustain reflexivity throughout the research process as an on-going dialogue within which the participants (the interviewees and co-researchers) consciously considered themselves in relation to their own production of knowledge and performance of subjectivity.

In practice, this involved working through pre- and post-interview notes, research diaries, the interview transcripts and post-interview email exchanges with participants collaboratively. Again following Riach (2009, p. 261), particularly highlighted within this process were moments of 'participant-induced reflexivity', representing a 'temporary suspension of conventional dialogues' affecting subsequent data collection and analysis. Interview strategies included encouraging discussion of disparities (e.g. 'are the relationships between these elements of equal or differing importance?') dislocating through temporal probing (e.g. 'how did you think about that issue at the beginning of your career?') encouraging alternatives (e.g. 'what did you think about writing on your Venn diagram, but did not?'), utilizing first and third person strategies to reconfigure positions (e.g. 'do you think that other people in a similar position to you have that experience?'), or questioning our own and participants 'knowability' (e.g. 'that's tricky for me to understand, could we talk a little more about that'). In some instances, these moments produced very in depth interactions during which particular issues that might otherwise have been taken for granted or obscured were discussed at length, opening up reflexive spaces within the

interviews and the research process more generally. In this sense, one of our participants reflected on the opportunity the research provided to discuss, as he put it, an important part of his life but one that was still ‘a bit taboo’:

To be honest, although being gay is such an important part of my life, talking about it is rare. Not many people ask questions. It’s taken for granted almost, but never ‘investigated’ by others. Accepting it is one thing, talking about it is still a bit of a taboo. (Email exchange with Chris, October 2012)

Given the possibly ‘taboo’ dimension of the research, we were also constantly aware of the potential impact of the research on participants and of the need to be continually mindful of research ethics. In particular, the methodological imperatives underpinning our anti-narrative approach required us to give careful consideration to the ways in which the research process might contribute to the fragmentation and negation of self that we discuss in our analysis below, by stirring up potentially emotional and sensitive issues that might be traumatic for those involved. We attempted to minimize the potentially harmful effects of the research on our participants by making the research process as dialogical and reflexive as possible. For instance, in terms of the research design, beyond standard confidentiality and anonymity protocols, we engaged participants in pre- and post-interview exchanges, particularly by email, where they indicated that they would welcome this and invited them to choose their own pseudonyms within the research. During the interviews, we positioned ourselves as research participants by inviting the interviewees to ask questions of us, and by sharing our own experiences. But more fundamentally, we were constantly aware of the ethical paradox underpinning our methodology, namely

that we were encouraging our participants to ‘undo’ carefully crafted versions of themselves that they had worked hard to construct and maintain. Debbie for instance, a male-to-female transsexual in her mid fifties, who works as a professional accountant, reflected on the disjuncture between the opportunity to ‘open up’ in the interview and the denial of recognition she experienced in her home life. As she expressed it, ‘what I get are these nice comments when I can sit and talk to intelligent people in a rational way, and then I’ll go home and I’ll get “God, you look stupid. Why are you dressed like that?” *You’ve got no idea*’ (Interview with Debbie, July 2012, emphasis added). That said, many of our participants commented on the extent to which they valued the reflexive space opened up by the research, acknowledging the opportunity it accorded to consider aspects of themselves which were important but rarely discussed, or even disclosed.

Attempting to sustain this dialogical approach, and constantly mindful of the ethical considerations outlined above, our data corpus was subject to a variety of analytical techniques that, contra to the usual expectations of analysis to form consensus, sought to focus on ideas and themes that emerged as contested or uncontained either across participants’ dialogues, or within our own analytical reflections. In light of our commitments to un/doing chrononormative narratives and the performative ontology underpinning it, we therefore sought to highlight the ways in which sexuality, ageing and work both enable a subject, and compromise or disrupt the apparent coherence on which subjective categories depend. Two main themes emerged from the study in this respect that we discuss in our analysis of the interview data below. These coalesced around (i) an emphasis on the dynamics of growing older as an LGBT person as both a period of relative freedom from the constraints of a heteronormative life course and,

at the same time encompassed, (ii) a process of negation. Connecting each of these two experiences in our participants' accounts, as we discuss in the penultimate section below, is an underlying concern with negotiating and narrating the dynamics of the desire for recognition of themselves as viable organizational subjects. In the next section, drawing on our empirical data, we discuss each of these two cues, emphasizing the role of organization as both workplace setting and social process in compelling and constraining the lived experiences of ageing, gender and sexuality at work, focusing on the ways in which ageing, gendered, and (hetero)sexualized subjectivities are narrated and performed.

### **Findings: Organizational experiences of ageing, gender, sexuality and work**

Recapping on the research questions outlined in the introduction, in this section we consider how age, gender and sexuality were experienced, understood and managed within organizations by our participants. As mapped out above, the study emphasized the dynamics of freedom and marginalization articulated as a process of living the negating experiences of violating the conditions of acceptability associated with chrononormativity, and being subject to the consequences of non-conformity.

Throughout the research process, many participants discussed, on the one hand, how they experienced growing older as a gay man, as a lesbian woman or as bi or trans person as a period of relative freedom from constraint, one that was sometimes also coupled with narratives of prestige and authority, such as the invocation of accumulated knowledge, expertise and experience. For example, several participants articulated this in relation to the negotiation of self-disclosure as LGBT in organizational settings. At the same time, however, and often in the same accounts

and examples, organizational and work-based experiences were also narrated and reflected in terms of exclusion and stereotyping, marked by marginal or ephemeral organizational experiences and roles, with ageing being discussed as both a time of anxiety and vulnerability, and of decline and exclusion or isolation. This involved on the one hand, an active rejection of what are perceived to be the constraints of a heteronormative life course yet on the other hand, a sense in which the participants themselves are at the same time ‘undone’ in Butler’s terms, in so far as they are marginalized, excluded and stereotyped, or subject to violence or rejection as a result. We discuss each of these analytical themes in turn below, teasing out the dynamics of recognition and negation in our participants’ accounts, focusing firstly on ‘undoing’ chrononormativity as a relatively affirmative performativity, one that provides an opportunity to ‘do things differently’ as Debbie put it, and second, on the negating experiences of being ‘undone’ by chrononormativity at work.

#### *Affirmative performances of work and organization*

For many of our participants, work and organizational contexts constituted important settings through which they felt able to actively re-negotiate their terms of existence. This created an opportunity for affirming their sense of self, and the potential for challenging heteronormative lifecourse expectations, as expressed by Winston, a freelance IT consultant in his late fifties:

Oh God, you get so much good from getting older, apart from the health issues. Although I’m very lucky, I’ve got very good health, actually. I’ve never really had a major problem. But you just get so much more settled. You haven’t got all this crap going on in your mind, you know? You’re very much

more at peace with yourself and with your environment, and I now put myself first – because I used to put everybody else first and I now put myself first. And I just think, well I’m sorry, if you don’t accept what I am, if you don’t accept what I do, hard luck. (Interview with Winston, July 2012)

For others such as Debbie, this involved reflecting on ‘coming out’ later in life as a time for themselves as opposed to their earlier life as financial providers or caregivers, and represented an opportunity that was understood as a privilege that had to be earned through fulfilling the obligations associated with the heterosexual matrix. Debbie summed this up when she recounted how until she ‘came out’ as a transsexual in her fifties her life had been spent primarily caring for others in a traditional, heteronormative breadwinner model, ‘dealing with my responsibilities, which I take seriously. But now I’ve reached a stage where I’ve honoured my responsibilities. So it is time for me’ (Interview with Debbie, July 2012). In this sense, heteronormative trajectories had prevented Debbie endangering her successful economic position within her rather traditional organizational culture. However, these heterosexual trajectories not only provided a coherent plot to position herself, what Byrne (2005: 58) refers to as ‘pegs on which to hang a story’, but also a justification for her delayed decisions to explore her transsexualism.

Those participants who had secure employment, or who worked in so-called ‘gay friendly’ organizational settings (Author B), particularly felt their current stage in life to be one of relative freedom to be themselves or as Emma (a freelance training consultant in her late fifties) put it, ‘allowing more of the whole me to be present’. In this respect, Emma positioned ageing as a resource on which she could draw, while

Sally, who was in her early fifties and worked in a theatre, related her own sense of freedom partly to chronology, but particularly to her organizational setting: 'I go to work... and I don't feel obliged to be 'out' overtly, and I don't feel obliged to be hidden. 'I just 'am' in my work situation, and *I feel like that's been the case for a while*. In a way, I have been more guarded elsewhere than in my current situation [at work]' (Interview with Sally, June 2012, emphasis added).

In these circumstances, age for Sally constituted an organizationally affirming performance that she could 'trade' in social encounters to gain recognition for her experience in the setting in which she worked. This not only held career possibilities in terms of securing future work through the value of her experience but was part of a process that allowed her to refute a reduction of age to aesthetics and how she looked, a common qualifier of older age in the workplace (Duncan and Loretto, 2004; Handy and Davy, 2007). Instead, she was able to frame her age as a signifier of her accumulated experience: 'usually if someone makes an assumption based on my appearance [she felt she looked young for her age], two minutes of conversation will rectify that completely, because I have too much experience for their number to add up' (Interview with Sally, June 2012). Here she refers explicitly to the way in which other colleagues positioned her in relation to chronological age, noting how her organizational experience disrupted aesthetic assumptions about age in this respect, an experience she found to be particularly affirming.

For Sally, her ability to reframe age in this way was accorded by the specific occupational norms of the setting in which she worked which, as she explained, has a 'legacy of tolerance' towards homosexuality. In her own words, this sector was

shaped by ‘a quality of tolerance and acceptance ... that probably [doesn’t] exist outside of it at all’ (Interview with Sally, June 012). Organizational affordances surrounding sexuality and ageing were therefore not simply a matter of localized and managed workplace cultures, but also attributed to the history and politics in which particular professions were located.

Winston echoed Sally’s perception when he explained how the IT sector in which he worked occasioned opportunities for ‘quirky’ performances, constituting an environment in which those who do not conform to normative expectations are valued. Rather than the multiplicity of his positioning resulting in Winston’s marginalization, as is often emphasized in accounts of sexuality and ageing (Phillips and Marks, 2008; Leonard et al, 2013), in this instance, it afforded him a degree of occupational advantage. As he put it: ‘the best IT people tend to be very quirky, sort of lateral thinkers, you know, off the board types’ (Interview with Winston, August 2012). In this sense, the dynamic relationship between age, sexuality and work was mobilized by Winston as an opportunity to construct an empowering sense of himself as an older, gay man at work, and the advantage of looking at things ‘from a different way and a different approach’:

I mean, I’ve gone in and I’ve met the most quirky or oldish sort of person. You know, bald head but hair down the back of their neck kind of touch, and flamboyant suit with handkerchief hanging out the top pocket but doing really well, because they’re just looking from a completely different point of view to an eighteen year old who’s coming in with goth gear on .... and you only get that with age and experience. (Interview with Winston, August 2012)

Here, Winston reflects on how ageing provides him with both an opportunity to play with cultural associations of sexuality and style, within an organizational sector (IT) which values not just experience but also the alternative perspective that is associated with being 'quirky'. This culmination of occupational relations alongside age and sexuality allowed the potential for both differentiation and 'a different way of being' (Byrne, 2005: 51). In contrast, while Debbie's workplace setting was more traditional (a professional accountancy firm), she was also aware of the opportunity that being older provided her in terms of her plans to transition from male to female, a relative privilege she understood as being attributable not simply to growing chronologically older, but to the accumulated experience and social network which was valued within her profession. Debbie was very conscious, however, that she might have to 'trade' her accumulated professional status in order for her to be able to successfully transition and remain employable. Age for Debbie was therefore framed as a resource for fashioning a trans- identity within the accountancy profession, and must therefore be understood within the context of what she herself described as a 'complex tangle' of constraints and compulsions. Occupational status, sector and organizational setting were important elements which constituted this 'tangle' for Debbie, who worked in an industry described by another of our participants as 'old, traditional and boring':

I don't want splashed over the Daily Mail 'Chartered accountant, partner in (name of town) firm of chartered accountants is transgender'. I don't want that very much. I just want to be able to be a regular girl. *If I can't be a partner in this firm, it doesn't matter. If it means I've got to do some work that maybe is*

*at a lower level than I do now, it doesn't matter. I just want to be ordinary.*

(Interview with Debbie, June 2012, emphasis added)

Echoing this awareness of the need to negotiate and 'trade' one form of security for another, our participants' working conditions were particularly important in shaping their affirming experiences. All but one of our eight participants worked either on a freelance or self-employed basis, and many evoked the benefits they felt this accorded them, particularly in terms of relative freedom from commitment, constraint and the need to 'fit in'. For some participants, such as Emma, this sense of transience was connected to nostalgic reflections on youth and organizational mobility. She described how, on first moving to London, she worked as a temp so that, in her words, she 'wasn't committed to an organization, [but] worked in different places every week'. This meant that on one occasion, when a colleague asked about the meaning of a badge she was wearing that said 'Dyke', she could not recall the details of the response, saying 'I don't even remember, because it was so irrelevant to me what the response was. Because I was only there for a week, I didn't care' (Interview with Emma, May 2012). While the details of the response were not important to Emma, the experience seemingly was, as an apparent marker of her own associations of sexuality, youth and the relative freedoms attached to transience. This was a set of associations she later contrasted with her own current concerns about being 'outed' at work, anxieties she articulated largely through references to her need to sustain secure employment because of material financial commitments and caring responsibilities she now has later in life, an increasing concern for older workers which is often ignored (Author A).

While several of our participants therefore articulated ageing as a resource that opens up possibilities for the performance of non-normative sexualities (including Winston's 'quirky' stylization, Debbie's plan to transition and Sally's ability to 'just be herself'), sexuality may also provide a means of disrupting chrononormative life course expectations. Chris, a gay man in his early fifties working as a freelance management consultant, reflected on his sexuality as a resource to transcend what he framed as a series of heteronormative life course markers:

All I can say is that it is an advantage in the sense that I don't belong, I don't have those expectations, I don't have to marry, make more money, have children - that whole idyll. So it creates a certain kind of freedom. And it makes it possible that I can stay young for a longer period in my life. (Interview with Chris, October 2012)

Here, as well as this relative freedom from constraint, Chris also draws on his sexuality as he evoked his own agentic capacity to 'stay young for a longer period', arguably exchanging one form of constraint for another by embracing the cult of perpetual youth valorized within gay male cultures referred to in previous research (Jones and Pugh, 2005; Slevin and Linneman, 2010). Running through our participants' accounts of their relative freedom were reflections on the extent to which this came at a price, often involving some form of trade off. These reflections that were often articulated through an awareness that workplace performances of sexuality, gender and age had to be carefully renegotiated in different occupational and organizational settings. In this respect, a constant threat of negation constrained the capacity of individuals to construct coherent selves, and to perform their identities

in a way that would position them as viable organizational subjects on their own terms, a theme to which we now turn.

*Negating experiences within work and organizational life*

Each of our participants was very aware of how, in order to negotiate the affirmative performances outlined above, they were also required to engage with heteronormative expectations scripting these performances. As such, these performances required ongoing negotiation and narration in order to maintain semblances of organizationally viable selves. In other words, participants had to maintain constant vigilance and actively perform themselves in accordance with the norms and expectations of what they thought would be accorded recognition. The conditions of acceptability were strongly shaped by experiences of discrimination and vulnerability and the imposition of totalizing positions that reduced many of our participants to essentialized stereotypes of their sexuality. As we discuss below, participants framed these negating experiences in terms of defensiveness and marginality.

In contrast to the relative benefits Debbie attached to accumulative status and experience and the professional and personal advantages this accorded her, Chris presented his reasonably transient working history as a means of escaping discrimination and the potential persecution attached to being an openly gay man (or as he put it, 'being on the witch list'). Chris reflected in particular on what it was like to work as an older gay man in organizational settings in which homophobia is widespread, suggesting that openly gay people 'will never ever get the high positions', regardless of experience and age-related seniority. Unlike Debbie's understanding of the accumulation derived from growing older at work providing a

degree of relative security, Chris understood this form of age-related accumulation as more than a lack of ‘cultural fit’ but in terms of risk, articulating it through his awareness of perceived associations with the ‘wrong kind of people’:

*Because there’s a high level ... of misconception of people – there’s a high perception with some people that you could do something bad, that people could try to blackmail you, or that you just belong to the wrong kind of people, or that it ... has a negative effect on the sales of the company ... It might have quite a big impact on a lot of things.* (Interview with Chris, October 2012, emphasis added)

Paul voiced similar concerns, being aware of the extent to which stereotypes of older gay men as ‘promiscuous, perverts and paedophiles’ had a negative bearing on how older gay men might be identified by others in the workplace, especially if they were known to be single. Being known as a gay man, and particularly an older gay man, may therefore result in exposure to inimical or limiting stereotypes, such as hypersexualisation which can situate gay men in highly stigmatized roles in which they are subject to accusations of inappropriate behavior at work (Evans, 2002), an association that many of our male participants were conscious of. As suggested by George, the former owner of a guest house, there was a constant possibility for sexuality to become *the* central identification point within organizational exchanges, requiring constant vigilance and performative self-awareness. As he put it rather succinctly, referring to assumptions made by some of his paying guests, ‘because you’re gay they think you’re always up for a shag’.

In Chris and George’s views then, being older and gay meant being stereotyped and essentialized, resulting in both men being very cautious about the disclosure of

sexuality at work in case they were appropriated into particular sexual discourses not of their choice. Emma echoed this caution when she said ‘it’s not a small question ... in identifying with lesbianism, there’s always loads of defensiveness’ (Interview with Emma, May 2012). Negation in this sense was commonly experienced as a process of being constantly vigilant, not able to be openly oneself in the workplace, echoing the sentiments of earlier accounts of professional gay men (Levine, 1979; Woods and Lucas, 1993). As Winston summed it up, reflecting on his experiences of working life, ‘I’ve never found it easy being gay at work’.

As a male-to-female transsexual, Debbie was also acutely aware of the costs of violating the organizational terms of the heterosexual matrix, in her case, as a result of her own process of transition. For Debbie, her transition, and her awareness of it as a ‘violation’, meant that she anticipated her work performance would have to alter from the masculine ‘older statesman’ role she had held as a man, giving an example of a recent work situation which required her to be ‘aggressive’, because she ‘knew that you fight fire with fire. You roll over and show weakness and he’s going to be all over me like a rash’. Post transition, Debbie anticipated losing this ‘edge at work’ through being unable to utilise age-related archetypes of older men as powerful organizational figures that was wrapped up in her style of negotiation at work. Instead, Debbie explained to us how, post-transition, she planned to exchange her masculine organizational status and age-related prestige for the ontological security she anticipated deriving from living as a woman, being fully prepared to embrace age-related archetypes of what she described as ‘just a middle-aged woman’ who is socially and organizationally invisible. Her ambition in this respect was just to ‘blend in’, as she put it.

Emma evoked a similar feeling when she described her desire to court invisibility in order for her identity as a lesbian woman not to assume a prominent role in organizational exchanges, this despite her accumulated experience and professional status. She acknowledged that in order to accomplish this, she had to performatively downplay instances when she began to excel and stand out because of her achievements at work. For example, she recalled how uncomfortable she felt leading a consultancy session with a work colleague in which, as she puts it, she started ‘to shine’, putting her under a figurative spotlight as a result:

I felt bad because I was in the limelight ... *My goal is not to shine, in fact I'd really rather I didn't, because of the visibility stuff which is connected with being a lesbian. You don't want visibility – there's a huge thing there.*  
(Interview with Emma, May 2012, emphasis added)

In contrast to accounts of older women's invisibility in an organizational setting (e.g. Ainsworth, 2003), Emma suggests her sexuality provides a precarious point of unwanted visibility at work. Explaining how she coped with this, Emma conjured up a metaphor of ‘heavy armour’ to explain her defensiveness. On the one hand, this was a useful protective device, but on the other hand, she felt it served to further isolate her, and to perpetuate her sense of loneliness, even amongst her work colleagues:

It's quite useful really. It means I don't get people making passes at me, of either gender. I can keep separate. I just don't have people too close or anything. I recognize the disadvantages of that...but it's been useful ... [But]

*anything that keeps you separate is a burden isn't it?* (Interview with Emma, May 2012, emphasis added)

In addition to metaphors of defense and protection, participants also described the need for constant vigilance, requiring the deployment of techniques that had to be learned over time. Chris, for instance, explained how he had developed the capacity to quickly assess other people's responses to him when he was at work, and how these shaped his decisions to disclose his sexuality or not. He described this skill as 'scanning':

I think you learn to scan quite fast if you can come out or not, whether it's okay to speak in a meeting and so on, or whether you have to wait. There's a lot of awareness around it – is it appropriate or is it not appropriate? And that is in many different situations at work. (Interview with Chris, September 2012)

As was the case for many of our participants, one of Chris's biggest fears was of being involuntarily 'outed' at work, something that he perceived as 'a constant threat'. Of all of our participants, it was perhaps Winston who was most reflexively aware of the conditions shaping his performance as an older gay man at work in this respect and particularly, of his own capacity to renegotiate these performances. At the same time, he was also very aware of the consequences of being 'misrecognized' as a gay man and of being outed in ways not of his choosing. For example, Winston expressed this as a desire to be gay but not to be recognized in terms of (what he saw as) someone who is 'camp' and overtly feminine - a particular stereotype common in

social narratives that often needs to be negotiated by gay men (Slevin and Linneman, 2012).

Instead, Winston consciously sought to open up opportunities to signify his desire to be recognized as masculine, which he pursued through the performance of a male skinhead identity at work. Notable here is that Winston's efforts to elicit recognition as a particular kind of masculine subject at work were manifest in how he described incorporating 'skin gear' into his office wardrobe, including 'Doc Martin boots', 'Levi's jeans' and, if the situation demands it, a 'Tonic-style suit', previously popular with male skinheads in the late 1960s. Despite the opportunities availed by the interplay between ageing, work and sexuality referred to earlier that enabled Winston to construct and sustain his identity in this way, he still found his masculine identity being misrecognized by colleagues, resulting in the negation of his desired subjectivity. Recalling one female boss he had previously worked for, Winston noted rather despondently how she had 'sussed out' his sexuality during their first meeting, despite believing his masculine persona did not make his gay sexuality 'obvious'. Winston suggested that the constant effort required to refashion his self may at some point become too onerous in terms of the energy needed, both emotionally and physically, in terms of sustaining and defending a coherent sense of self as a gay skinhead in and outside of work. In this respect, he explained how it would most likely be the ageing process that would eventually constrain his efforts to renegotiate and narrate his gendered and sexed identity on his own terms: 'The only thing that'll ever stop me is if I look at myself and think, "I'm getting too old for this lark." But I haven't reached there yet' (Interview with Winston, July 2012). What Winston was aware of therefore was the need for constant negotiation of the contingent dynamics

of recognition on one's own terms and the limits of organizational acceptability, and particularly the impact of the ageing process on the latter, a theme to which we now turn in our discussion, returning to insights from Butler's analysis of performativity and the heteronormative organization of the desire for recognition of oneself as a viable, coherent organizational subject.

### **Discussion: Negotiating the dynamics of desire and recognition diachronically**

So far we have examined how sexuality, ageing and gender are experienced in and through organizations by those 'who do not subscribe to heteronormative logics of desire' (Taylor, 2010, p. 896). In reflecting on lived experiences of gender, sexual and ageing performativities for the LGBT participants in our study, we were struck by the complex and dynamic interplays between affirmation and negation, revealing how chrononormativity is experienced within organizations, and also acts as an organizing process in itself. On the one hand, the relative freedom from chrononormativity that many of our participants attached to growing older as LGBT people meant not being restricted by what they saw as the constraints and associated life course expectations of a conventional, heterosexual existence. On the other hand, many of our participants recounted experiences of marginalization and exclusion, emphasizing the negating effects of violating chrononormativity as the temporal corollary of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2000a; 1993).

In practice this dynamic meant, as Chris outlined in the opening quotation, that all of our participants maintained a constant vigilance; they were always being 'busy negotiating a line' and conscious in and of their performance in the workplace. Chris summed this up when he reflected on the ambivalences attached to LGBT life courses

and the dynamics of freedom and negation emphasizing what in Butler's terms might be understood as a very performative sense of self: *'Life story, biography, can change. There's a freedom in that. But it also means that there's a lot of remorse'*. (Interview with Chris, October 2012). Understood in this way, chrononormativity both enables and constrains the precarious, fragile narrations of our participants as viable organizational subjects as they grow older. This emphasizes that the fundamental vulnerability of being 'given over' to the Other that allows for the possibility of both recognition and negation discussed by Butler (2004), can and must be understood in relation to chrononormativity. Hence, the normative expectations associated with the heterosexual life course served to constrain LGBT performances for our research participants, undermining their complex lived experiences and denying or mis-recognizing their attempts to narrate themselves as coherent subjects within organizational settings. As a result, many of our participants recounted experiences of conditional acceptance at best, reflecting on their working lives as a constant struggle for recognition through which their sense of self has to be perpetually 'put at risk' (Butler, 2004: 149) articulated, for instance, in references to their constant fear of being 'outed' in circumstances not of their choosing.

With this in mind, as outlined above, the main conceptual contribution of this article is extending Freeman's (2007, 2010) critique of the heteronormative life course to our analysis of lived experiences of working life. We have teased out the ways in which individuals are subject to hegemonic assumptions regarding organizationally appropriate performances of sexuality, age and gender shaped by 'chrononormativity'. Drawing on Butler's performative ontology is fruitful here because we can observe how chrononormativity is constituted through an iterative

series of stylized performances undertaken by the subject in order to conform to the expectations and norms of the heterosexual matrix. Invoking her recognition-based critique of the normative conditions governing cultural (and organizational) intelligibility, for instance in terms of employability, enables us to understand chrononormativity as the life course corollary of the heterosexual matrix and its implications for those who violate heteronormative life course expectations. This means that exploring ageing without a critical appreciation of how chrononormativity shapes and limits our understanding of organizational practices and experiences may simply replicate the marginalization of those who cannot or chose not to follow normative lifestyle paths within organizational research, a relative neglect which this paper has sought to address.

Drawing on Butler, we can begin to understand how the availability of viable organizational positions is constrained by the normative expectations and life course implications of the heterosexual matrix. Her performative ontology enables us to interrogate how 'successful ageing' depends upon conforming to a set of assumptions orientated primarily around a heterosexual orthodoxy, one that rewards certain performances and negates others through the conferral or denial of recognition, respectively. Further, mobilizing conceptual resources within Butler's writing enables us to make an ontological shift in our understanding of ageing within organizational settings and as an organizing process in itself. What this means is that we are able to move from ageing as a purely categorical or discursive phenomenon, towards ageing as a performative process through which particular subject positions are recognized as viable while others are negated. This is important to acknowledge as it highlights a systematic conflation of complex lived experiences due to the compulsion to perform

a coherent narrative that conforms to heteronormative assumptions regarding the (working) life course. Viable sexual, aged and gendered identities therefore come into being only through re-iterative performances that are recited diachronically, ‘compelled by the regulatory practices’ of social and organizational coherence (Butler, 2000a, p. 24).

In addition, this ontological shift enables us to think more about the complexities of how ageing relates to other aspects of lived experience, including those associated with organizational status, sector and setting, and of the corresponding conferral or denial of organizational subjectivity. In this sense, it moves us towards an appreciation of the ways in which multiple yet marginal performativities require constant negotiation and narration. Doing so demands that we begin to think more about how organizations are lived and managed, and how they *ought* to be experienced (and indeed studied) in order to make all organizational lives viable through the pursuit of a more inclusive politics of ageing within *both* organizational practice and research. As Butler (2004, p. 17, emphasis added) argues:

It becomes a question for ethics ... not only when we ask the personal question, what makes my own life bearable, but when we ask, from a position of power, and from the point of view of distributive justice, *what makes, or ought to make, the lives of others bearable?* Somewhere in the answer we find ourselves not only committed to a certain view of what life is, and what it should be, but also of what constitutes the human, the distinctively human life, and what does not.

With this in mind, our methodological aim in this paper has been to disrupt the apparent linearity of workplace narratives, and what Butler (2000a) describes as the illusory coherence of performativity, in order to provide a critical, reflexive space in which participants in the research could ‘unravel’ their own narratives. In practice, this meant devising methods of data collection and analysis that facilitated an ‘undoing’, in Butler’s (2004) terms, of what Heaphy and Einarsdottir (2012) describe as the ‘scripting’ of our sexual selves, encouraging participants to reflect on the performative processes at stake in sustaining socially recognizable, seemingly coherent narratives of their organizational selves as aged, sexualized and gendered. Drawing on Butler we can understand these experiences in terms of the dynamics of desire and recognition, articulated in our participants accounts of ‘undoing chrononormativity’, through their sense of relative freedom from constraint, whilst at the same time as themselves being ‘undone’ by its negating effects. As such, our study adds an important diachronic dimension to Butler’s discussion of the conditions of viable subjectivity, and of the dynamics of recognition.

## **Conclusion**

Such generalities must be considered on the caveat of the sample limitations. Whilst our sampling strategy aimed to access as wide a reference point as possible, our final group of participants was mainly middle class professionals with post-compulsory education, employed primarily in white-collar professions, However, as Byrne (2005: 48) reminds us, the meaning of this classed position for different individuals will invariably invoke variable performances and possibilities. Rather than attempt to homogenize any experience of growing older at work as a self-identifying LGBT individual, this research highlights the richness and diversity of performances which

may be enacted across space and time. It is the richness of these accounts that provides the potential to extend our findings to broader accounts of organizational ageing.

If age does indeed become a 'pathology' in later working life, as suggested by Ainsworth and Hardy (2008, p. 402), to what extent does the multiplicity of selfhood, particularly as this multiplicity is organized around one's sexuality and gender, sequester or open up career orientations, opportunities and expectations in later working life? Further research needs to be undertaken in this area and in this paper we have begun to map out an ontological shift as well as a conceptual apparatus and methodological approach that could potentially inform this research. We have done so by developing a performative ontology of ageing as a negotiated, narrated process within organizations driven by the desire for recognition and therefore shaped by chrononormativity. As the life course corollary of the heterosexual matrix, we have argued that chrononormativity effectively 'undoes' the organizational performances of older LGBT people, serving to confer either a conditional affirmation on them, or simply to negate the viability of their attempts to narrate coherent selves within organizational settings, and through organizational processes. Our methodology has sought to 'undo' in Butler's terms the performative coherence of these narratives, and to provide a reflexive space within which the dynamics of relative freedom from constraint and the compulsion to conform could be reflected upon. In this sense, we have begun to address what we have argued is a neglect of LGBT people both within organizations and organization studies mapped out at the beginning of this paper. Moreover, it provides a valuable conceptual apparatus for exploring the ways in which all organizational subjects encounter and negotiate chrononormativity in their

desire for recognition as they grow older within organizational settings. One particular advantage of so doing is the opportunity for examining heterosexualities in organization, examining how these might deviate from and conform to chrononormativity, in order to move beyond essentialist and homogenized understandings of heterosexuality, ageing and work.

In conclusion, we have sought (to evoke Chris), to 're-negotiate a line', and to open up empirical, methodological and theoretical avenues for further research on ageing and organization. Specifically these help us to understand more about ageing as performative and as constituted in heteronormative terms within and through organizations dynamically and diachronically. Developing a performative understanding not only provides important insights into the ways in which ageing is experienced by LGBT people within organizational settings, but also shows how, by drawing on a recognition-based critique, we might begin to 'undo' chrononormativity and its organizing imperatives and effects.

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<sup>i</sup> In *Undoing Gender* Butler replaces this term (derived from Adrienne Rich's work) with 'presumptive heterosexuality' (see Butler, 2004, p. 186).

<sup>ii</sup> The term 'anti-narrative' is used here to describe our methodological approach to the interviews as a reflexive process of 'undoing' (Butler, 2004), one that seeks to unravel seemingly coherent narratives, including chronological narratives, and to encourage critical reflection on the conditions and consequences of their construction. It therefore differs from Boje's (2001, 2008) concept of 'ante-narrative' which emphasizes that in order to understand the full complexity of storytelling surrounding organizational phenomena it is important to examine the small, fragmented discourses that are told 'live', as events unfold. These fragmented, incoherent pieces of story are referred to as 'ante-narratives' and are viewed as storytelling before narrative closure is achieved. In contrast, following Butler and emphasizing that because the self requires constant narration, our methodological premise precludes the possibility of narrative closure but instead, seeks to 'undo' the conditions compelling the pursuit of closure and apparent coherence.

<sup>iii</sup> Venn diagrams are traditionally used in mathematical illustrations of connective sets. Inspired by Fournier's (2002) account of how the participants in her research eluded discrete categorisation of their identities, our incorporation of the Venn diagrams into our methodology was designed to encourage participants to identify how aspects of themselves that they felt were particularly important were dynamically interrelated. In practice, we offered participants an illustration of how the Venn diagram might be used, emphasizing that this was merely for illustrative purposes, and then (using a whiteboard to allow for flexibility) invited participants to draw their own version of the diagram. Seven of our participants took us up on this invitation; one declined as he felt that the form was too mathematical and restrictive in the sense of not being able to capture the fluidity of what he wanted to convey. Several other participants altered the form and added material around their circles to convey more detail regarding the context of their identity performances. Emma, for instance, encircled her entire diagram with a larger circle that she labelled 'lesbian' to emphasize that she felt this aspect of her identity was the most all-encompassing. In contrast, Winston attributed greater priority to his gay 'skin' identity, reflecting this in his own diagram.