Queer theory perspectives on schools as organizations

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Abstract:

Queer theory has been deployed as a tool for many purposes and has been quite useful in the field of organizational studies. And while theorists vary in their emphases depending on specific contexts, there are similar ways queer theory is presented in the literature.

Keywords: queer theory | organizational theory | schools | gender | education

Article:

Introduction

> Queer theory is a form of intellectual tumbleweed, drifting unevenly and taking root within an array of academic disciplines including those where one might not expect to encounter it. (Rumens, 2016, p. 114)

Queer theory has been deployed as a tool for many purposes and has been quite useful in the field of organizational studies. And while theorists vary in their emphases depending on specific contexts, there are similar ways queer theory is presented in the literature.

For example, a common concern among queer theorists is their commitment to what is referred to as *anti-binary*. This specific tenet of queering organizational theory emerged because earlier feminist research did a good job of informing us of the continued stereotypes and discrimination in the workplace based on legally defined sex categories; however, these endeavors 'served to essentialize male/female differences rather than unpack the complexities associated with gender roles' (Capper, 1999, p. 7). That is, queer theorists reject the notion that only two sexes (male/female) and only two types of gender expressions (masculine/feminine) exist; rather, identity is considered fluid, something that is learned or performed, instead of something concrete and acquired in the womb (McDonald, 2017). Some theorists have encouraged us to consider gender as existing on a continuum: If people are given the freedom to develop their full potential without constraints, they will develop some combination of interests, strengths, weaknesses, and propensities that are idiosyncratic to the individual based on a combination of physiological, psychological, and cultural factors (Acker, 1992a, 1992b; Blount, 2005; Fine, 2010).

Directly related to the anti-binary stance is the rejection of categorical thought (McDonald, 2017). However, there is inner tension involved with taking this standpoint and it begs the question: Can queer theory identify *queer* as an identity category while also claiming to destabilize identity categories (McWilliams, 2015)? Queer theorists are aware of this paradox and have thus committed to acknowledging the existence of categories but also working to deconstruct rather than reify typical categories that could potentially label people as abnormal, immoral, or otherwise inferior (McDonald, 2017). For instance, McDonald (2017) contends that referring to someone as *woman* has more often than not signified additional identities, such as white, middle-class, and heterosexual. This is problematic because women most likely experience 'gender' depending on other contextual complexities, such as race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, and whether a person identifies as queer. This has led queer theorists to embrace Black and Chicana feminist thought that insists on taking an intersectional approach to understanding a person's experiences (Anzaldúa, 2007; Lorde, 1984). For example, Woodruffe-Burton and Bairstow (2013, p. 362) view lesbians as a 'double minority' that presents a particularly powerful 'threat to the patriarchal status quo of organisational America.'

In order to resist prolonged entrapment in the mire that is patriarchy, queer theorists are committed to questioning what is considered 'normal' and 'abnormal' and, relatedly, exposing and denaturalizing the heteronormativity in culture at large and organizations specifically (Bendl, Fleischmann, & Hofmann, 2009; Courtney, 2014; Dumaresq, 2014). Judith Butler refers to the 'heteronormative matrix' that is composed of four phenomena, summarized by Bendl, Fleischmann, and Hofmann (2009, p. 627):

1. Most societies are organized along a dualistic sex-model in which every individual must have a defined sex – female or male. Transgendered or intersexual persons who do not fit into the dual sex system are confronted with exclusion and suppression in every-day life.
2. Since the 1970s, gender has been defined as the social construction of femininity and masculinity. Gender has been recognized as the basic but well-established way of doing things in social organizations. It explains the social division and hierarchy of sexes in political, social, economic and cultural contexts as well as the gender-related patterns of work division and segregation.
3. Sexuality is a set of social processes, which produces and organizes the structure and expression of desire in a certain society and it is inevitably intertwined with (and even constitutive of) social power relations.
4. Heterosexuality is the unquestioned norm in most social contexts, as the 'normal' and hence the normative sexual orientation is based on the dual conceptualization of sex/gender (Butler 1990. Thus, (hetero-)sexuality functions as a social regime (Seidman 1996) setting the social rules and possibilities, regulating not only sexual practices but also social practices.

In a nutshell, patriarchy is threatened by those who do not fit the male/female binary, people who refuse to act out traditional ideals of masculinity and femininity, and, most obvious, same-sex desire. Said another way: Patriarchy is afraid of queers and committed to their obliteration. That knowledge, coupled with the stubborn hold patriarchy has on society, fuels the movement to queer organizational theory.

The purposes of this chapter are to answer the following questions: What is queer theory? How might it be useful to those who study educational organizations? Why does it matter? First, I share the historical and theoretical foundations of queer theory and consider the blurred boundaries and paradigmatic tensions between queer and feminist thought. Thereafter, I share interesting features of the landscape by describing how researchers in other fields have used queer theory to better understand organizations and professions such as nursing, accounting, and human resources. Afterwards, I turn my attention to the field of education and how scholars are using it to critique policy and practice in schools. Finally, I offer my perceptions of why queer theory matters for the educational leadership field and how queering schools as organizations might take form.

Historical and theoretical foundations

The purpose of this section is to share some of the historical turns in organizational studies research that contributed to the emergence of queer theory as a lens to view educational organizations. While it is impossible to give a thorough account of all the elements that came together to make this happen, I do share some of the significant landmarks, such as the shift to more critical ways of approaching research generally, and organizational studies in particular, with a more detailed focus on researchers who brought the concepts of sex and gender to the fore.

Historically, educational researchers aimed to increase their perceived respectability by taking a more 'scientific' approach to both research and practice (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Scott & Davis, 2007). Similarly, the administration of schools took on the nature of the factory model, opting to follow 'the one best way' (Brooks & Miles, 2008). A major shift in research occurred in the 1980s whereby academia no longer viewed quantitative, positivist approaches to research as solely legitimate (Ouchi, 1981). Instead, qualitative research methods – borrowed from anthropology – were now acknowledged as valid approaches, as well. This coincided with the trend of increased interest in cultural explanations of organizational behavior and change as well as the inclination to view organizations as open systems that interact with cultural context (Cook & Yanow, 1993; Mills & Tancred, 1992; Schein, 1993, 2004; Scott & Davis, 2007). Carr (2005, p. 483) reminds us that, 'at best, the natural sciences can only ever observe and infer, yet the social sciences can actually ask its 'subjects' and thus 'discover' meaning and intentionality.' Carr goes on to clarify that explaining phenomena may be easier to do by using quantitative data, but 'statistical significance is not enough to really understand organizations' (2005, p. 483).

Along with a general swell in critical scholarship across disciplines in academe, the organizational studies field also faced growing criticism for what had been perceived by some as its ethnocentric and pro-capitalist biases (Acker, 1992a, 1992b; Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Cox, 2001; Gherardi, 1995; Mills & Tancred, 1992; Schein, 2004; Scott & Davis, 2007). Meanwhile, emerging feminist theorists also criticized many aspects of the modern organization, including how: femininity is equated with subordination; power is analogous with masculinity, and; bureaucratic life assumes a strict separation of the professional and personal. However, feminist scholars of the 1970s through the 1990s (e.g., Kathy Ferguson, 1985; and Arlie Hochschild,= 1983) were not the first to critique organizations and call for transforming the workplace. In 1926, Mary Parker Follett urged approaching the management of people and organizations with a greater focus toward building personal relationships across the organization without strict hierarchical boundaries.

Gendering Organizational Theory

Joan Acker (1992a, 1992b), a seminal scholar whose focus was the gendered nature of organizations, outlined essential elements to explore gender in organizations as a variable. While there was an explosion of research documenting women's persistent difficulties in the workplace, there was yet a lack of research that theorized explanations as to why gender inequities continued in organizational life. In her attempts to remedy this gap, Acker offered what she believed was a viable framework for gendering organizational analyses. These building blocks, which can be utilized by other scholars in various proportions to fit particular research endeavors, included examining gendered processes, investigating gender and sexuality in terms of organizational resources, and uncovering the gendered substructures of an organization.

First, Acker (1992a, 1992b) defined *gender* as socially produced patterns of behavior that differentiated people as either *masculine* or *feminine*. In other words, a person might be born with the chromosomes that indicated an individual as male or female, but they were not predetermined to exude either feminine or masculine characteristics based on their chromosomal combination. Rather, people were typically socialized to lean toward one binary or the other.

One essential element of gendering organizational theory that Acker (1992a, 1992b) forwarded was to look for gendered processes that take place in an organization. For example, researchers might examine the production of gender divisions and identify the ordinary organizational practices that produce/reproduce these patterns. In other words, one might discover and describe whether there is an existing gender pattern of job types, wages, power, and subordination (Acker, 1992a, p. 451). Acker also recognized the importance of speaking directly with men and women to better understand their internal mental work as they made sense of their labor and their place in an organization. Do women and men express that demands are placed on them as far as gender-appropriate behaviors? If so, what were they and what effect did these demands have, if any?

In addition to looking at processes that may be gendered, Acker (1992a) also advocated examining gender and sexuality as organizational resources. That is, physical, human bodies – both male and female – can be considered capital. For example, Acker, and later Sangster (2007), both found that the lower a worker was in the organizational hierarchy, the more tightly-controlled the corresponding physical body. Conversely, higher-level employees were rewarded with fewer bodily constraints. For instance, store clerks are rarely allowed to empty bowels or bladder as the body dictates; rather, only when the time clock or boss indicates permission. Meanwhile, managers have access to the executive washroom as a matter of privilege. And Acker urged us to remember the timeworn practice of using women's sexuality and procreative abilities to objectify or exclude them while men's sexuality overshadows most workplaces and underpins their organizational power (Acker, 1992a, p. 453).

Finally, Acker (1992a) advocated the study of the gendered substructure of organizations. According to Acker, a gendered substructure was the foundation for gender discrimination to manifest. Acker described a gendered substructure as the spatial and temporal arrangements of work, the cultural rules prescribing workplace behavior, and perceptions regarding relationships between work and non-work lives. Acker especially took issue with the assumption that work was separate from the rest of life, and that the organization had 'first claim on the worker' (1992a, p. 453). Gendering organizational theory might lead to researchers asking questions such as: How does the organizational mission make assumptions about work–home roles and responsibilities? How is company use of time implicated differently for women and men? How is use of space in an organization different for men and women? Who are the organizational leaders? What kinds of gender attributes do they exude? How do they actively influence the culture of the organization? Taken together, feminist theory confronted the existing paradigms of organizational theory and challenged them in ways that gendered thinking in the field.

From Feminism to Queer Theory

To be sure, feminist theorists broke new and essential ground, and as Woodruffe-Burton and Bairstow (2013, p. 371) point out, their findings on Lesbian leaders parallel prior research on women, stating: '[T]he tensions experienced by lesbians in conditions of heteronormativity may mirror those experienced by women leaders in the context of power relations that are permeated by gender and patriarchy.' Further, and similar to liberal feminism, queer theorists take a critical approach, looking at power, oppression, and stigma (Adelman & Lugg, 2012; Capper, 1999; Fielden & Jepson, 2016; Lugg & Murphy, 2014). Both perspectives also focus on diminishing gender stereotypes and support gender and sexual equality (Adelman & Lugg; Lugg, 2003, 2006; Lugg & Murphy, 2014; McDonald, 2016). Moreover, similar to feminists who assert the need to *gender* organizational theory, queer theorists advocate *queering* organizational theory in order to make visible some of the blind spots in the feminist approach to research. It is important to point out that feminist and queer theorists use the words 'gender' and 'queer' as *verbs* that indicate purposeful action, rather than nouns that name – or adjectives that describe – specific people (Muhr & Sullivan, 2013; Ruitenberg, 2010; Rumens, 2016). However, while both feminist and queer perspectives share similar interests and concerns, queer theory differs from feminist theory in important ways. These differences are discussed next.

Queering Organizational Theory

As alluded to above, queer theory owes a debt of gratitude to those in women's and gender studies who have come before them.

According to Mary Klages (1997):

> Queer theory follows feminist theory and gay/lesbian studies in rejecting the idea that sexuality is an essentialist category, something determined by biology or judged by external standards of morality and truth. For queer theorists, sexuality is a complex array of social codes and forces, forms of individual activity and institutional power, which

> interact to shape the ideas of what is normative and what is deviant at any particular moment. (para. 17, as cited in Fusarelli & Eaton, 2011, p. 41)

According to McDonald (2017, p. 131), queer theory 'is a contested body of thought that is constantly evolving.' Queer theory has also been described as an unapologetically political (McDonald, 2017), unequivocally subjective (Lugg, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2006), and explicitly postmodern or deconstructive (Capper, 1999; McWilliams, 2015) approach to theorizing power relations, societal structures, the physical body, social identity, knowledge production, and learning. McDonald (2017, p. 131) shared:

> Teresa de Lauretis (1991) is credited with using the term 'queer theory' for the first time, although Judith Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble* and Eve Sedgwick's (1990/2008) *Epistemology of the Closet* are widely regarded as having laid the foundations for the development of queer theory. In these texts, both Butler (1990) and Sedgwick (1990/2008) address the key themes that have been central to queer theory's development: the performativity and fluidity of identity, a rejection of categorical thought, and a political stance that celebrates difference and antinormativity.

In addition, queer theory's antiassimilationist political stance is more than a theory about queer people. Indeed, according to McDonald (2017), queer theory is relevant for all people regardless of how they identify. Ruitenberg (2010), drawing on the earlier work of Edelman (2004), goes so far as to describe queer as an 'unidentity.' While queer theorists abhor categories and strict definitions (Bendl et al., 2009), it is vital to clarify some important terms to aid our understanding before moving forward.

'Performativity' and other relevant terms

The performativity and fluidity of identity is a theme that is particularly salient in Butler's (1990) work. Because she argues that gender does not exist except through its (re)enactment, she conceptualizes gender as a fluid and malleable construction that can be disrupted and resisted through subversive performances. Biehl (2008, p. 522) agrees and points out that the performative acts that signal one's gender are 'governed by clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions.' As such, Butler's notion of identity as performance is quite appropriate to consider in organizational studies as it is related to the professional performativity of executives and other employees regardless of how they identify. For example, when we refer to people with whom we work as 'wearing a variety of hats' or 'putting on an "X" hat' in a particular situation, what we are describing is what Biehl (2008, p. 523) refers to as the 'theatricality of organizational events.' That is, how 'performers' use 'mise en pièces' and 'mise en scène' to portray and reproduce certain roles. In other words, workers use their voices, clothing, and body language, responding to other actors' costumes and performances, as the situation relates to contextual props and scenic backdrop (2008, p. 524). Next, we examine some words that invariably come up (and are quite often misunderstood) when discussing queer theory: sex, gender, and sexual desire.

Sex

According to Lugg (2003, p. 98), sex is 'chromosomal.' Blount (2005, p. 14) would agree, stating sex is 'one's anatomy and physiology.' But even then, sex is not (or should not be) constructed as binaries because some human beings are born with *both* male and female genitalia while others are born with *ambiguous* genitalia. To explain, there are other variations of chromosomal make up. For example, most high schoolers learn that possessing the 'XX' chromosomal combination results in the development of a female baby and the 'XY' pattern is the formula that leads to the formation of a baby boy. However, most high school biology classes do not share the medical research around other chromosomal combinations such as XXY and XYY, nor is there discussion as to how the human being develops if they possess this combination of sex chromosomes or what happens to babies in particular cultures that are born without discernible sex organs. Thus, queer theorists argue against the binary male/female because it ignores individuals who are intersexed or those who do not identify with their assigned sex. As Lugg (2003, pp. 98–99) describes:

> [T]here are individuals who are transgendered, meaning that they do not identify with their sex or sex characteristics. Rather, their sense of self differs from their biology in profound and complex ways. A transgendered person who was born a male will identify as a female throughout most of, if not her entire, life. Likewise, a transgendered person who was born female will identify as male. Those who elect to pursue sexual reassignment surgery are known as trans-sexual.

Thus, a description of how queer theorists describe sex also leads to a discussion of what is meant by gender.

Gender

Muhr and Sullivan (2013) and others (Blount, 2005; Lugg, 2003) point out that while gender and sex are certainly related, one's sex assignment at birth does not mean one's performance of gender characteristics directly follow. Rather, these scholars look to Butler's notion of performativity to help explain the concept of gender stating:

> Performativity suggests that gender is not naturally strong-armed to sex or the biology of bodies, but instead implies that our perceptions of gender categories are developed on the basis of continuous repetition of certain historical contextualized behavior. (Muhr & Sullivan, 2013, p. 419)

Similarly, Lugg describes gender as an 'ongoing, lifelong series of evolving performances' (2003, p. 98) while Blount depicts gender as 'a set of stories that people tell themselves and each other about what it means to be men and women' (2005, p. 14).

Queering the view of biological sex and gender performance becomes the sticky wicket when it comes to personnel management. Sex is a protected class under US law and policy, whereas gender is not. Thus, organizations cannot discriminate between two employees who identify as 'man' and 'woman,' whereas a man who exhibits characteristics traditionally considered feminine is not protected by law. Further, men who 'act stereotypically female' are automatically assumed to be 'homosexual–regardless of their actual orientation' (Lugg, 2003, p. 100).

Sexual orientation

Biological sex, gender performance, and sexual orientation are different but interrelated constructs. While the expectation in most cultures is that all three characteristics are fixed and predictable, queer theorists point out that biological sex does not necessarily dictate how someone experiences sexual desire (Blount, 2005). For example, a biological man may perform what has been perceived as typically masculine gender characteristics, but this does not necessarily mean his sexual desire is for biological women who exude what has been deemed femininity. Rather, the person under consideration may experience what Blount calls, 'same sex desire.' Thus, according to cultural mores, that individual's sexual orientation does not align with societal expectations. Capper and colleagues (2006) point out that individuals whose sexual orientation means desire for someone of the same biological sex might be referred to as 'gay.' However, it is offensive to refer to gay men as 'homosexuals' due to its outdated, clinical definition that indicates an abnormal condition (Capper, et al., 2006; Lugg, 2003; Ruitenberg 2010). In addition, those who experience same-sex desire do not consider their sexuality a 'preference' or a choice; thus, using the term 'sexual preference' rather than 'sexual orientation' or 'sexual desire' is to be avoided (Capper et al., 2006).

How has queer theory been used in other disciplines?

While queer theory has been affiliated with the humanities for decades, scholars in other fields, such as organization studies generally and business, accounting, and personnel in particular, have discovered its usefulness relatively recently (McDonald, 2017). For instance, scholars of organization studies have used queer theory to critique definitions of leadership and management, including how it is performed, who performs it, and how and why they perform it in the ways they do (Courtney, 2014; Muhr & Sullivan, 2013). In addition, queer theory has been used to deconstruct organizational binaries and identities (McDonald, 2016; Rumens, 2017), expose and critique heteronormative practices (Rumens, 2016), critique policies and practices around 'diversity' (Metcalfe & Woodhams, 2008) and human resource development (Rumens, 2017), shed new light on how and why some occupations, such as nursing (Kellet, Gregory, & Evans, 2014) and accounting (Rumens, 2016), are segregated by sex (Bendl et al., 2009; Broadbridge & Hearn, 2008; McDonald, 2016), and challenge postpositivist approaches to research, and the grand narratives that emerge from them (McDonald, 2016, p. 135). In addition, researchers have troubled over messages portrayed via symbols in corporate logos and images in advertising materials (Broadbridge & Hearn, 2008). Similar to early feminist research, most scholarship using queer theory in management and organization studies has been theoretical, consisting mostly of rereading prior studies via a queer perspective (McDonald, 2016). McDonald points to Parker (2001) as a seminal work since it is the first of its kind using queer theory to deconstruct the term 'management.'

Bendl, Fleishmann, and Hofmann (2009) used queer theory to analyze the codes of conduct of three companies with claimed commitments to creating an inclusive organizational culture. However, since diversity and inclusiveness efforts depend on demographic categories like sex, gender, race/ethnicity, and age, heteronormative values persisted. Treating workers as 'having one sex, one stable (over the entire life span) sexual orientation and one clearly defined gender, which are congruent with each other' indicates the organizations' continued adherence to 'essentialist divisions to signify diversity' (Bendl et al., 2009, p. 628). Thus, while intentions may have been good, choosing an essentialist conception of identity worked to maintain hegemony.

In the UK context, Fielden and Jepson (2016) examined the experiences of lesbian and bi-sexual workers and learned that working in the public sector was a more positive experience for lesbian and bi-sexual people than working in profit-generating corporations. However, since heterosexist attitudes were still customary in the culture at large, most organizations have continued to be dominated by a heterosexist male power structure. Examples include employee benefits that coincide with heterosexuality but ignore the needs of queer employees. Thus, organizational sexism continues to deny the existence of anyone who is not heterosexual. However, in the public sector, the lesbian and bi-sexual community reported a more positive climate. Participants reported that changes in the law facilitated a culture of change, which then led to career satisfaction and ultimately career progression. The good news is that the situation is improving for queer workers in the UK, but the bad news is there remains a large swath of the working population who do not feel protected by the law and/or experience homophobia in the workplace.

Another interesting study, conducted by Muhr and Sullivan (2013), followed the transition of John, a transgendered organizational leader, into Claire. Speaking to Claire's coworkers revealed that the transformation of the physical body influenced the ways employees perceived the appropriateness of Claire's (versus John's) leadership. For example, when John performed leadership, it was viewed as natural and normal. However, co-workers expressed discomfort when similar leadership behaviors were performed by Claire. Even though Claire was the same human being in many respects, the morphing of people's perceptions was powerfully wrought via the materiality of her transformed body. Thus, while Claire was accepted by her employees as they respected her decision to live as a woman, they were unable to put aside traditional, gendered expectations that seemed to manifest of their own accord. In other words, as Muhr and Sullivan point out, Claire's employees showed 'tolerance for queer bodies' but failed to adopt a 'queer understanding of bodies and subjectivities' (2013, p. 430). Muhr and Sullivan conclude by advocating for a shift in organizations: that we don't just 'make room for queer leaders' but queer our notions of leadership so that any *body* can perform any combination of customarily-observed feminine and masculine characteristics as the context demands.

McDonald (2016) points out that one major limitation of most queer occupational research is its focus on biological gender, presented as a male/female binary. Rarely, do studies also examine identities associated with performing gender and sexuality outside the heteronormative paradigm. Indeed, even if researchers look beyond the male/female binary, there is a troubling neglect of attention to the concept of intersectionality or the idea that social identities are too complex to examine only one axis of difference in isolation.

The following year, McDonald (2017) advocates for the expansion of re-reading organizational scholarship via a queer lens, especially strategic management, organizational culture, and corporate responsibility. The hope is that by queering existing research, scholars can more adequately challenge normalized views and advance unorthodox observations on organizational life. For example, questions that queer theory helps us to explore in organizational research include:

1. How are (hetero)normative assumptions embedded into existing organizational theory?
2. How do organizational members reproduce/subvert the gender binary?
3. In what ways does organizational (hetero)normativity discipline organizational members?
4. How do organizational policies and cultures compel the performative re-enactment of organizational and gendered norms?
5. How are certain forms of difference suppressed in organizations?
6. How does the 'closet' shape the everyday organizational experiences of non-normative subjects? (McDonald, 2017, p. 143)

I agree with McDonald (2017, p. 143) that exploring these queered questions hold potential to contribute valuable insights into organizational studies, especially for 'nonnormative subjects who must continually negotiate the pervasive ideology of (hetero)normativity.'

Another important contribution of the expansion of queer theory in organizational studies would be its eventual inclusion of queer paradigms in organizational studies textbooks. But, since queer theory continues to be underexplored, it is rarely addressed in university classrooms focused on organizational studies (McDonald, 2016). Indeed, the 'absence of queer theory from textbooks can thus be read as being reflective of the continued dominance of functionalist and managerial paradigms within management and organization studies (Rumens, 2016, as cited in McDonald, 2016, p. 26).

How has queer theory been used in the field of education?

Ruitenberg (2010, p. 619) queers the study of education by asking:

> Can queer families be represented in curriculum materials and discussed in classrooms? Can queer relationships be seen at school? Can queer teachers be 'out' to their colleagues and students? Can the word 'queer' be used in school? In short: can queerness be shown and seen, spoken and heard in educational spaces and discourses?

Undeniably, the invisibility and silence of queer students, teachers, principals, and families is not a thing of the past. Rather, as long as society is bound by patriarchal values, queer educators and students will continue to strive for 'visibility, audibility and sayability' in educational organizations (Ruitenberg, 2010).

In addition to being ignored altogether, the mistreatment of queer children and youth in our schools is well documented. Indeed, not only are non-conforming students subjected to bias and discrimination, as pointed out by Adelman and Lugg (2012, p. 45), 'it is acceptable to denigrate and devalue' sexual minorities. However, the Safe Schools Movement has drawn attention to the needs of LGBTQ students, such as the necessary roles queer mentors and straight allies play in the lives of queer students (Sadowski, 2010). One example of this movement is the continued growth of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) in public schools. However, even this small step toward creating a positive school climate has met with severe opposition. For example, according to

Ruitenberg (2010, p. 618), 'the Salt Lake City School Board (Utah, USA) was so desperate' to block the development of GSAs, they voted in 1996 to ban all afterschool clubs from their schools. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to remunerate the abundant research evidence documenting the disparate treatment and outright cruelty aimed at non-conforming children and youth in schools. Instead, readers are encouraged to consult manuscripts that I have found useful for additional support: Adelman and Lugg (2012), Allen (2011), Hudson (2017), Ruitenberg (2010), Zacko-Smith and Smith (2010), and Zook (2016).

In addition to bringing to public attention the incessant, ghastly treatment of queer children and youth by both peers and educators (Adelman & Lugg, 2012), queering the study of education has also involved drawing attention to historical practices that have had direct and/or residual anti-queer implications, such as hiring decisions and dress codes, to name just two (Adelman & Lugg, 2012; Lugg, 2003, 2006). For example, 'sodomy laws, in conjunction with morality clauses in public educators' employment contracts, have been used to keep queer educators either closeted, their identities hidden, or to fire them if revealed or "outed"' (Adelman & Lugg, 2012, p. 38). Indeed, patriarchal organizations, such as schools, remain committed to heterosexuality and gender conformity as important litmus tests for who is fit to serve as teacher and/or leader (Adelman & Lugg, 2012; Lugg, 2003, 2006; Muhr & Sullivan, 2013; Tooms, Lugg, & Bogotch, 2009). Only heterosexual masculine men and feminine, caring heterosexual women are perceived as worthy to work as administrators and teachers, respectively (Muhr & Sullivan, 2013; Tooms et al., 2009). In fact, educators who do not fit the aforementioned archetypes are marked unsuitable early on in employment processes (Tooms et al., 2009). For example, similar to men who seek jobs as nurses, men who apply for jobs to teach Kindergarten are suspected gay, which poses imagined hazards to young children. Indeed, school personnel are still forced to 'demonstrate their gender conformity and heterosexuality' today as they were in the 1800s through the 1900s (Adelman & Lugg, 2012).

There are many other fine examples of how researchers have used queer theory to investigate personnel issues in educational organizations. However, since I am limited by page count, I direct readers' attention to some excellent articles (in addition to those cited above) that I have found especially helpful: Biehl (2008), Capper (1999), Courtney (2014); Dumaresq (2014), Fielden and Jepson (2016), Kellett, Gregory, and Evans (2014), Lugg and Tooms (2010), and Woodruffe-Burton and Bairstow (2013).

Finally, I share some of the research that brings to the fore the need to include queer children, youth, and caregivers/families in books, curriculum, and other educational activities, in addition to providing a comprehensive, non-biased sexual development and health program (Hudson, 2017). This seems especially important due to the continued bullying of gay students and the fact that in 2006 there was an estimated 10 million families in the United States with parents who identified as LGBTQ (Bower & Klecka, 2009).

Larsson, Quennerstedt, and Öhman (2014) believe gender norms could be challenged in physical education classes involving activities and sports teams. Both boys and girls are stigmatized when boys are said to be physically stronger than girls and girls as weaker than boys. Also, many PE classes are gender segregated based on the type of sport or activity being played. Anderson, Cheslock, and Ehrenberg (2006) believe such schools are not in compliance with Title IX of the

Educational Amendments within the Civil Rights Act of 1964 since it states, ‘No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance’ (US Department of Education, 2015, para 2).

What would a PE teacher do if a student who identifies themselves as a heterosexual female really wanted to play football, but was not allowed to because of her biological sex? What if that female student was so good at football that she could obtain a college scholarship but would not be afforded the opportunity to do so because of her biological sex? Or what if a heterosexual male wanted to play softball but his school only had a team for girls? If not addressed appropriately, according to Snapp and colleagues (2015), childhood/youth development might be thwarted precipitously. It is important for adults to realize that a girl who wants to play football and the boy who wants to play softball is not necessarily taking a political stand to disrupt the status quo. Rather, each student simply wants to play a sport that does not align with typical gender stereotypes. In response, Larsson et al. (2014) suggest that PE classes should be gender-neutral or allow students various sports-related activities to choose from as a way to decrease gender-related discrimination.

The few schools that do include LGBTQ issues within a school curriculum consist mostly of learning about civil rights and the history, lives, and contributions of LGBTQ people. According to Snapp and colleagues (2015), while simple and easy to do, the above discussions and lessons go a long way toward creating a safe, equitable, and less prejudicial school climate. In fact, ‘When schools taught LGBTQ-inclusive curricula, students on average reported a greater sense of safety, heard fewer homophobic slurs and experienced less victimization … 67% of LGBTQ students reported that their classmates were accepting of LGBTQ people when the school taught inclusive curricula’ (Snapp et al., 2015, p. 581).

Other curriculum suggestions that are currently under consideration and/or have been implemented include using children’s literature to teach about gender identity and different family structures and including queer parents in class activities (Cullen & Sandy, 2009; Gerouki, 2010). One example of a children’s book that challenges heteronormative standards is, *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell. The authors tell a story about two male penguins living in a zoo who find an abandoned egg and raise the baby chick together. Cullen and Sandy (2009, p. 145) explain that after reading this story to students, they ‘expanded the repertoire of characters in the book to explore various themes that arose, including the diversity of family structure, relationships, and identities in the zoo. In the adaptation of the story, children included adopted, intergenerational, same-sex and single-parent families.’ In sum, queering schools is fraught with challenges, tensions, uncertainty, and ambiguity. However, queering the study of schools as organizations is ripe for potential and powerful change. The implications of both are discussed next.

Discussion: The implications of the queer critique

The purpose of this section is to further unpack some of the main points raised in this chapter and discuss some of the implications for schools as organizations. In addition to critiquing particular structures and practices that take place in schools, an attempt will be made to *queer* what is being critiqued in order to *reimagine* how schools might become more inclusive of all who learn and work there.

Binary Opposition

As explained earlier, a major concern among queer theorists is the use of binaries to describe people's characteristics and explain phenomena. This leads to many implications for our consideration. First, labeling people according to their 'race' and 'sex' is problematic. When we choose to label people as White/Black and Boy/Girl we are automatically making value statements as well as positioning people in opposition. That is, in our culture, we usually use binaries in a particular order, which unconsciously creates impressions in the human mind that the first label designates the normal or superior while the second label generates visualizations of that which is uncommon or inferior. Most people take for granted that the language we use is value-neutral when in fact our choice of words has great significance. In addition, using binaries to name and describe people automatically assumes there are only two possibilities available: one is either a boy or a girl. Ignoring the very real possibility that a person is both or neither is not part of most people's vernacular; thus, an intersex person is erased altogether.

This has implications for how we do school, beginning as early as registering for Kindergarten Round-Up. Since the changes were made to the 2010 United States Census, school registration has queered to a degree in most places. For example, there is greater acceptance that people are more than just white or another race that is not considered white. People self-identify in many different ways and this was finally recognized in our country's most recent Census by providing 14 different choices in terms of race/ethnicity. And, there has been some progress in terms of indicating relationship status. For example, on the Census, one can identify as more than just single, married, divorced, or widowed. The bureaucratic structure of the US government has finally begun to recognize other living arrangements that are part of our everyday lives – and have been for decades. For example, a gay man could choose to indicate on his Census that he has a husband. However, there is no way of indicating one might be in a same-sex marriage or partnership. In other words, there is no box with the words, 'same-sex married couple' beside it. Unfortunately, we cannot say there has been any progress in terms of how people can self-identify (or not) in terms of their sex. Similar to the 2010 Census, school registration forms still list two binaries of which to choose: *boy*, *girl*. And if one checks the *girl* box, it must match one's birth certificate or the sex that was assigned at birth because there are huge implications for how school is done for people identified as boys and girls at birth. Whatever box one checks designates the physical education class to which students are (not) assigned, which sex-ed talk students are (not) allowed to attend, which sports team students may (not) participate in, and the list goes on. Recent news reports and court cases demonstrate that K-12 students' bodies are so tightly regulated that some cannot choose the bathroom they feel most comfortable using. This is a poignant reminder of how low students rank in the hierarchical order of schools; and further, how trans-gender students do not rank at all.

This is important because, first of all, *it counts to be counted*. Political philosophers, Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth (2003) refer to *recognition* as being central to our current struggle with identity politics and human rights; *recognition is fundamental to justice*. Lack of recognition is a type of silencing, erasure, and even death in that it marks human beings as non-existent. One cannot count what is not there. But, we all know queer students really do exist. So why do educational organizations not count them? Why are queer students not recognized? We learned from Seidman (1996) and Butler (1990) that binary notions of sex (and gender) function as a social regime that dictates the rules and possibilities within an organization. To count would acknowledge existence. To acknowledge existence (recognize) would compel doing school differently.

So, what would queering schools look like in terms of taking an anti-binary stance? Future teachers, principals, and superintendents would learn in their preparation programs that identity is fluid, learned, performed. Education students would discuss in their classes that recognition is vital to achieving a more welcoming school culture and a first step toward social justice. Students in leadership preparation programs would brainstorm ways they could queer their schools in authentic, concrete ways. For example, while educational organizations at the state level dictate data schools must report, it is still within the purview of the local education agency (LEA) to decide which data they will use to develop policies around what are appropriate courses, curriculum, and extracurricular activities.

Educators are in the business of developing people. Rather than treating birth sex assignment as the most important characteristic that determines a student's life course, a school that is queered would consider gender as existing on a continuum, view human development as idiosyncratic to the individual, and structure the school accordingly. Registration forms might ask for sex, but in a modified way. For example, schools might ask for sex assigned at birth in order to comply with state structures. But, the LEA could also ask students how they identify and how they wish to be recognized. In terms of bathrooms, rather than single out trans-gendered students as people who are so dangerous they have to use an adult restroom, student bathrooms would be designated gender-neutral and the faculty bathroom made available to any individual who feels the need for more privacy (determined by the student regardless of how they identify). Queering school might mean students could choose which courses to take and in which extra curriculars to engage. Some people may find that standpoint unusual and impractical to implement and argue that this is a silly 'PC' idea that no school district has ever tried. However, I know from experience that this is not the case.

I attended my last two years of high school in Bettendorf, Iowa. In 1980, the population of Bettendorf was about 25,000. There were 444 students in my graduating class. In this relatively small Midwest city, Physical Education classes were not segregated by sex or by athletes/nonathletes. Instead, every four weeks or so, all students signed up for which unit of study they wanted to attend. I remember signing up for archery, weight lifting, and gymnastics as well as basketball and dancing. The only rule was that students could not sign up for the same unit more than once. Rather, students were encouraged to experience a variety of different sports and ways to keep fit. This meant I learned how to use the balance beam alongside football players and did power lifting with wrestlers. I loved it. We all loved it. This type of learning is not silly PC antics. It is treating young people with respect and affording them the opportunity to grow and develop in an integrated environment and be exposed to different sports and other physical activities they may not otherwise experience due to family belief systems and/or household income. I remember these days with extreme fondness. And now, I realize: I went to a *queered* school. In Iowa. In 1980. So, it can be done and done well without controversy.

Rejection of Categorical Thought

As discussed earlier, eschewing classifications is another major point raised in queer theory. Rejection of categories is an especially pertinent topic for discussion here due to the fact that organizational studies have developed around categorical concepts. For example, organizational theory can be categorized into various schools of thought based on the philosophies of well-known scholars, such as Michael Cohen, James March, Karl Marx, Johan Olsen, Talcott Parsons, and Max Weber. Particularly pertinent to this chapter are relatively recent developments, such as neo-institutional theories, as well as cognitive and cultural explanations of the impact institutional structures have on individual behavior as well as the influence of individuals on organizational change. Considering the implications of queer theory for schools induced further reflection on neo-institutional theory generally and isomorphism in particular.

Schools are characterized by coercive isomorphism in that they react to pressures (e.g., federal Title IX laws) from other institutions they are dependent upon (state legislature for funding) and cultural expectations from society, which is becoming ever more diverse while schools struggle to maintain homogeneity. Recall Fielden and Jepson's (2016) research that looked at how distinctive queer women's experiences were in government organizations when compared to the profit sector. Government employers were more likely to build a more positive climate by showing commitment to new civil rights legislation. The power of national policy changes influenced decision making at the organizational level that resulted in greater career satisfaction and progression for the lesbian and bi-sexual people who participated in the study. On the other hand, negatively coercive policies, such as morality clauses for educators, work to create a negative career experience for queer teachers and principals that can even result in being fired for not fitting the descriptive categories that a particular group deems moral (Adelman & Lugg, 2012).

Change in schools is also driven by normative isomorphism, or pressures brought about by professional organizations, higher education, and credentialing (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Just as K-12 schools are places where norms are embedded, norms developed during one's university education are carried into the K-12 setting upon graduation.

Much of the discussion on binaries in the prior section is directly related to whether and how people are categorized. But queer theorists are not just interested in categories such as gay/straight and feminine/masculine. Queer thought considers demographic categories like sex and age as being important considerations in the change process. This leads one to think about other ways students are categorized that may trap students into a category that is unhelpful, ultimately thwarting students' developmental growth and maintaining hegemony toward particular groups of students. For example, students are classified into groups with labels such as 'gifted,' 'special education,' and 'free and reduced lunch.' Teachers are categorized as 'highly qualified,' 'troops to teachers,' 'Teach for America,' and 'substitutes.' In addition, since schools are bureaucracies, there are clear hierarchies between groups of educators such as 'principals' and 'teachers,' with structural arrangements tied to who evaluates whom and which group decides how to spend the budget. In addition, there are clear distinctions between those classified as teachers and those categorized as paraprofessionals. And all of these categories and their labels communicate where a person is in the organizational hierarchy and work to develop and/or maintain fissures between groups of people.

So, in addition to what's been discussed before, what might resistance to categorization and/or classification look like in schools that have been queered? First, the queering of K-12 schools would lead one to question: Who is the leader? Who is the teacher? Who is the student? And what those labels mean in terms of power and voice (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018; Rodela & Bertrand, 2018). Likewise, one might wonder what schools might be like if schools organized themselves differently from the typical organizational structure of schools and universities? Put together, it would lead one to ask whether the school principal was the only true leader of a school or whether schools should become more democratic in terms of who has voice and who gets to decide (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018; Rodela & Bertrand, 2018). A school that has queered its leadership practices would recognize and legitimize students (Lac & Mansfield, 2018), parents (Fernández & Scribner, 2018), and community groups (Welton & Freelon, 2018) as co-leaders of their schools.

Conclusion

New institutionalism theorizes that we do things the way we do because we can conceive of no other alternative. Add to that the extreme difficulty of attempting to impact bureaucracies, one could conclude that schools are trapped in patriarchy. However, as Elwell (n.d., para. 39) reminds us:

> While Weber had a foreboding of an 'iron cage' of bureaucracy and rationality, he recognized that human beings are not mere subjects molded by sociocultural forces. We are both creatures and creators of sociocultural systems.

This thinking aligns with professional standards that call upon school leaders to participate in political advocacy to influence the governmental institutions they are dependent upon (Carpenter & Brewer, 2014; Mansfield & Carpenter, 2008). For example, educators might write letters to Senators and Representatives as well as federal agencies such as the Department of Education to demand enforcement of Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In addition, educators might collaborate across local and regional education agencies to advocate for equitable school funding at the state capital, for instance. To be sure, political advocacy can be risky and may not result in the changes educators are hoping for. But ignoring the options afforded us rarely pressures bureaucrats from reconsidering how things have been done for decades, even centuries.

We might also conclude that participating in theoretical critique is useful, as it works toward the descaling of one's eyes, revealing alternative possibilities. Plus, reimagining concrete ways to work toward change also generates hope and fuels resilience. However, that is not enough; organizations are stubborn beasts! We must recognize, as new institutionalism does, that organizations are influenced by institutional peers. Normative isomorphism is unlikely to occur unless pressures are brought about by the educational leadership professions. As we know from the Iron Cage that is Patriarchy, education is a robust and durable norm developer. Thus, queering norms within the profession via higher education, along with queering the credentialing associated with that education, holds the greatest potential to bring about normative and substantive change.

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