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Bodyspace at the pub: sexual orientations and organizational space

Abstract

In this article we argue that sexuality is not only an undercurrent of service environments, but is integral to the way that these workspaces are experienced and negotiated. Through drawing on Sara Ahmed's (2006a) 'orientation' thesis, we develop a concept of 'bodyspace' to suggest that individuals understand, shape, and make meaning of work spaces through complex sexually-orientated negotiations. Presenting analysis from a study of UK pubs, we explore bodyspace in the lived experience of workplace sexuality through 3 elements of orientation: background, bodily dwelling and lines of directionality. Our findings show how organizational spaces afford or mitigate possibilities for particular bodies, which simultaneously shape expectations and experiences of sexuality at work. Bodyspace therefore provides one way of exposing the connection between sexual 'orientation' and the lived experience of service sector work.

Keywords: Ahmed, Hospitality, Embodiment, Phenomenology, Sexuality, Space, Service Sector.

Introduction

The sexualisation of customer services, in the form of attractive employee bodies, intimate customer-employee exchanges and seductive atmospheres is now well established (Filby 1992; Williams et al. 1999; Warhurst and Nixon 2009). Our concern is not with the existence of sexualisation, but the way sexuality is spatialised in organizations through employees embodied knowledge. How does sexuality inform the way work spaces are negotiated? How are employees bodily 'orientated' towards particular modes of sexuality deemed as

acceptable, or even possible? And in what way might a spatial analysis inform our understanding of sexuality as an embodied organizational experience more generally? To explore these questions, we focus on how sexualised spaces are negotiated, created and contested in one particular service space - a UK chain of public houses.

Our focus is derived from two avenues in current scholarship. Social studies of sexuality have addressed the importance of geographies of eroticism, prohibition and purification in urban and social spaces (Measham 2004; Hubbard and Sanders 2003; Hubbard 2004). By contrast, in recent studies of sexuality and organizations, space is often assumed but rarely explicitly addressed unless specifically exploring work practices such as sex work or sexualised labour (see Brewis and Linstead 2000; Hubbard and Sanders 2003; Green et al. 2010). These two avenues together highlight the importance of conceptualising the body as the location of meaning in terms of how sexuality coalesces with organizational space and have led Pullen and Thanem (2010: 4) to suggest that studies exploring spaces of organization need to place bodies at the heart of analysis:

Even though sexual politics have made significant progress in many parts of the world (Matthias, 2007), scholars need to critically interrogate [...] the centrality of the body in managing space. This may lead us to explore whether we need a different kind of politics and whether this is a politics of the body.

Within studies of service-based labour, the concept of a service space rarely includes a consideration of how dynamics surrounding sexuality and sexualised 'identity work' are constituted by employees in a way that actively shapes space. The spatial element in service work is often conceived as an arena into which sexuality passively enters, 'brought' into

organizational performances as an extension of labour (Warhurst and Nickson 2009). Yet recent work encourages a more active reading of spatialised sexualities as integral to the dynamics of organizational life (e.g. Tyler 2012). This potential for sexuality to be viewed as a constituting force highlights the inherently embodied dimension of sexuality. It exposes how individual labour is experienced within the spatial matrices of particular organizational contexts (Tyler 2011; Dale and Burrell 2007).

Situating our study at the crossroads between these two literatures, we seek to explore sexuality at work as spatially embodied. We introduce the idea of ‘bodyspace’ through drawing on Ahmed’s (2006a) concept of orientation in order to explore how sexuality as a bodily phenomenon creates spatial possibilities. Following Burrell’s (1984: 112) suggestion that the “investigation of locales and episodes in the sexual underlife of the organization is probably a useful starting point for any full analysis”, we explore the lived experience of sexuality in one particular organizational setting. In drawing on findings from a study of a UK chain of public houses, we accept that this particular research setting is not typical of many work settings. However, it does provide an insight into ways that organizational sexuality reproduces particular orientations that influence the spaces of customer service work. It highlights how sexuality is an active organizing force that both directly and indirectly shapes other dimensions of working life.

We first provide an overview of recent research exploring service work, paying particular attention to how sexuality has been simultaneously viewed as culturally important through the enactment of bodily performances and actions, and underplayed as a constituting dynamic of work spaces. Noting the lack of focus on the experiential dynamics surrounding space in service work, we introduce the concept of bodyspace to capture how sexual ‘orientations’

manifest in organizational spaces. Using our empirical research based in a chain of public houses in the UK, we outline some of the spatial specificities of this organizational setting, before focussing on three elements of orientation which appear influential in the context of bar work: background, bodily dwelling and lines of orientation. In discussing the implications of this study, the article concludes by suggesting body space is a theoretically fertile way of exploring how dominant modes of sexuality are made coherent in organizational contexts.

Sexualising Service Work

Within service industries, employee looks and behaviour have been characterised as playing an integral role in customer experience and service. Customers may ‘read’ sexuality through employees’ looks, or view the employee body as a site of aspiration or desire (Mills 2006; Warhurst and Nickson 2009; Smith Maguire 2008). Within this context, sexuality acknowledges the importance of gender, space, sex, and eroticism as dynamics which constitute organizational life (Bolton 2005; Brewis and Grey 1994; Brewis and Linstead 2000; Shilling and Mellor 2010; Simpson 2005), particularly its place in the service economy (Filby 1992; Abbott and Tyler 1998) where customer relations may be “achieved through the colonization of workers’ sexuality” (Brannen, 2005: 435).

In positioning sexualisation as a commodity, the concept of emotional labour has been employed to highlight how sexuality is ‘scripted’ into the labour process (e.g. Warhurst and Nixon 2009). However, Adkins (2000) suggests that the commodification of the aesthetic is not only about matching an appropriate body to a product, but the ongoing production of a sexualised subject through a variety of organizing processes. For example, Filby’s (1992: 29) discussion of sexuality in betting shops notes that “sexuality is also embodied in gaze, deportment and clothing, and sometimes more obviously expressive physical encounters”.

Such practices are most notable where displays of the erotic or sex are an explicit part of the product, requiring workers to negotiate complex expectations of customers, management, employees own perceptions of professional care, and selfhood. Studies of sex work or the sexualised industries, such as lap dancing, exotic dancing or adult entertainment certainly highlight sexualised professional behaviour as requiring an active negotiation between self and social (e.g. Brewis and Linstead 2000; Sanders 2005; Mavin and Gandy 2013). Yet strategies adopted by workers in sexualised industries to deal with sexuality may also be relevant for those in service settings. These include the need to develop a sophisticated set of coping, distancing and interpersonal strategies in order to navigate the precarities of sexualised interactions – practices that may also be pertinent to those in other service settings.

Serving roles within the leisure sector have historically been sexualised (Kirkby 1997). Acceptable sexualised conduct may be different for waitresses than for other ‘caring’ professions such as nurses (Huebner, 2008). Employees therefore negotiate exchanges in a context subject to pervasive pressures that result from employee commodification, doing so in environments that encourage customers to seek out pleasurable and intimate experiences. Within the pub industry in particular, in themed bars employees are viewed as playing an important role in the construction of an ‘authentic’ experience (Muñoz et al. 2006). While emotional resistance may take the form of humour or distancing strategies (Sandiford and Seymour 2010) studies suggest that cultures of excess or revelry of such as higher than average instances of drinking amongst restaurant workers form a key part of the experience of working in this sector (Moore et al. 2012). Such settings may also provide opportunities for sexual encounters for employees since sexuality is deemed to be ‘out there’ and part of the broader cultural milieu (Monaghan 2002; Lerum 2004). The conflation between labour and leisure also results in a complex negotiation of what sexual behaviours are deemed as

acceptable or not, as suggested in Giuffre and Williams' (1994) study of sexual harassment and waiting staff. However, while the important role public house employees play in creating what is construed as a space for sexual potentialities is often assumed, attention is usually focussed on the customer's sexualized consumption, rather than on the bar worker (e.g. Corey 1996).

Accounts of the servicescape assume that sexuality and sexualised behaviours occur within a relatively fixed topographical working environment that bodies move through. However, the performance of service may also be viewed as an embodied act which actively constitutes the spaces in which leisure is experienced. In her study of restaurants, Erickson (2004: 777) suggests that space is a key dimension to the dining experience, arguing that "workers are like hosts to the guests, but they also function like route guides to the social rules that govern the space". Using the metaphor of dance, Erickson shows how the physical interaction of bodies is a fundamental element of creating an intimate restaurant setting. While her account pays less attention to how different forms of sexuality actively mobilise or create organizational space, it nonetheless highlights the value of exploring the constitution of service space through employee's embodied actions.

We agree with Erickson's (2004) suggestion that service workers may take a more active role in the creation of sexuality, but how might this be conceptualised? One established avenue that has enabled the individual to assume a more subjective position has been in the (re)turn to the body as both a site and constitutive element of organizing space. A growing research literature explores the working body as a meaning-maker and locus of experience (Brewis and Linstead 2000). While the connections between embodiment, sexuality and space have enjoyed less attention in the organizational literature, Green et al.'s (2010) attention to places

where sexuality is mobilised and shaped highlights how sexuality is delineated through particular spatial constellations of organization. These intertwine with both the material, as highlighted in the evocation of location in Tyler's (2011) study of Soho retail workers, and the symbolic, as Nencel (2010) forefronts in her study of secretaries and miniskirts. Organizational space is thus informed by organizational, social or political mores that are subject to ever-changing regimes. However, we argue that this 'sexual sociality' (Green et al. 2010) is not only located in the physical or symbolic, but is fundamental to how we come to know the world as sentient embodied subjects.

Bodyspace: Understanding Sexual Orientations at Work

'Bodyspace' is a term adopted in this paper to capture the lived experience of space through focussing on bodies and "the ambiguous setting of their intercommunication, the point at which their boundaries run into each other, or against their woven fabric" (Merleau-Ponty 1945/2006: 193). Often alluded to in phenomenological studies of inequality (e.g. Young 1980; Allen 2004), Duncan's (1996) edited collection of the same name suggests, through a discussion of gendered geographies, putting the body centre stage is an explicitly political project which challenges traditional privileging of a particular type of the rational, disembodied thinking. This political project is relevant to organizational scholars too. Rather than deny the possibility of bodily behaviours where erotic potential is confined to particularly places (Burrell 1984: 108), the body is afforded the position of an open and interactive entity. Bodyspace not only signifies the interplay between material and symbolic elements of context and self, but sees the body as central to the constitution of meaning which affords possibilities. In this sense, space is not a container, but created in the process of experience: it is bodies that make spaces.

To develop this idea, we turn to Ahmed's (2006a; 2006b; 2007; 2010) analysis of "how bodies take shape through tending toward objects that are reachable, which are available within the bodily horizon" (2006b: 543). Central to this is the concept of 'orientation', understood as an encounter from which we start and proceed, and – important for our purposes here – "the point of alignment between spaces and bodies" (Ahmed 2006b: 563). This acknowledges a debt to both Husserl's (1989) notion of orientation, and Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2006) concept of perspectivism (the way we become part of the world). However, rather than view this epistemological starting point as 'neutral', Ahmed argues that the very means through which we draw ourselves into the world is reliant on perception being located in a *particular* body.

Two spatial consequences follow. First, from this position, the culmination of various objectsⁱ and the way they are organized creates the space which we take up. In other words: "The objects that we direct our attention toward reveal the direction we have taken in life. If we face this way or that, then other things, and indeed spaces, are relegated to the background" (Ahmed 2006b: 546-547). Space then, for Ahmed, is always a space for action, or "field of action" (Ahmed 2006a: 65), concerned with what is possible or within our grasp in terms of how we inhabit it and what we can do. This echoes Steyaert's (2010) reflection on 'space' moving from noun to a verb something that is 'done' or achieved, rather than simply there. Second, spatial articulation occurs through individuals viewing objects in the world as already 'in place'. Our experience of in-placeness is therefore best understood as being one of comfort, or at least familiarity. We assume that the way space appears to us is not the culmination of numerous orientations, but rather is simply 'the way the world is'. Even though spaces can only take on orientations through the bodies that occupy them, the feeling of 'in-placeness' results from particular styles of embodiment being enacted over time to the

extent that space is experienced as a naturalised or objective phenomenon. These embodied trajectories determine what is within our reach, and where we locate ourselves and others.

Sexuality can be viewed as capturing a form of orientation which is at once an embodied trajectory orientating us to our world, bodies and selves, and a means of creating the spaces we inhabit. We would argue that 'sexual orientation' can be glimpsed through the analysis of both 'orientating objects' – something that puts us into line and makes particular experiences possible or not possible, and 'orientated objects' - the deluge of different bodies, histories and memories. In her focus on the 'straightening' of sexuality, Ahmed's stance is an overtly political one attempting to queer phenomenology, denaturalising assumptions surrounding heterosexual logics of desire. However, even when exploring heteronormatised experience, we can draw out three interrelated spatial elements of 'orientation' that are relevant to understanding sexuality as a spatial phenomenon in organizational experience.

The first aspect is the concept of 'background'. This is not simply the idea of something as marginalised, but rather the idea that particular objects, such as sexuality, have a background in terms of a genealogy in itself which explains its "conditions of emergence" (Ahmed 2006b: 549). These backgrounds extend beyond the individual, are inherited, and become woven into our bodies, pulling them into particular orientations. Sexuality, the way in which desire eroticism and sexualised relations become bodily possibilities, emerges from connections between histories, memories and bodily habitation. Sexuality as an object (similar to Ahmed's object of 'whiteness') must be viewed as always "ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in particular directions, affecting how they take up space" (Ahmed 2007: 150). Background therefore may help us to 'turn towards' certain

objects surrounding desire, sex, romance, flirting and so forth, encouraging the habitation and reorientation of certain spaces and our feeling of in-placeness within them.

The second tenet is the importance of ‘bodily dwelling’, which highlights that the point at which perception, or orientation, occurs, is not neutral, but is affected by the in-situ body. Unlike the Husserl’s (1989) concept of the ‘nullpunkt’ or zero point of orientation as neutral, Ahmed argues that the very act of perception is never neutral or objective since it “involves such acts of relegation that are forgotten in the very preoccupation with what it is that we face” (Ahmed, 2006a: 547). Depending on our bodily dwelling, certain orientations may be more or less afforded: we orientate ourselves towards objects as they afford us some possibility, but always from a position which may be delineated from our gendered, aged, racialised and sexualised, *inter alia*, self. Yet if we come to know ourselves and the world through orientation, then it is inevitable that in being ‘put into line’, we accept different bodies as suitable for occupying different spaces, which in turn we take up and dwell within. To this extent, “bodies are submerged, such as they become the space they inhabit; in taking up space, bodies move through space and are affected by the ‘where’ of that movement” (Ahmed, 2006a: 53). Spaces become orientated through the way that particular bodily dwellings shape in a material sense. These in turn influence the way our bodies take up space, inhabit space and subsequently comprehend and reconstitute space as a coherent organizational experience.

The final element is what Ahmed terms ‘lines of directionality’. In one sense this is similar to the idea of our bodies being interpreted and therefore constituted through various narratives such as concepts surrounding beauty. However, Ahmed argues that this is not merely discursive interpellation. It requires a consideration of not only *how* particular bodies are

pulled in through their situatedness, but an appreciation that we become our bodies in the way we move and how we are organized, or ‘directed’ in some ways rather than other ways. Through the enacted repetition of these lines of directionality, the line itself disappears from view and shapes the body. These lines “are both created by being followed and are followed by being created” (Ahmed, 2006a: 16), and create spaces for action that naturalise the normative, which inform the extent to which the self may be ‘extended’ by the space it inhabits.

Denaturalising social matrices of hetero-normative desire as well as challenging phenomenology for its inherent privileging of an assumed neutral body leaves little room in Ahmed’s thesis to explore particular contexts, such as organizational settings. However, she does suggest, albeit in passing, that organizational spaces are important to how we orientate bodies and selves, so “we can also consider ‘institutions’ as orientation devices, which take the shape of ‘what’ resides within them” (Ahmed, 2007: 157). Taking this into consideration, our analysis now explores how these three dimensions of orientation influence bodyspace within a particular service sector: a chain of UK public houses.

Introduction to Empirical Setting

Funtimes (a pseudonym) is a large chain of pubs which, at the time of research, had over 500 outlets across the UK focussed on the 18-35 demographic. The research involved in-depth interviews with 48 employees and managers throughout the chain, supplemented with observational fieldwork carried out by author 1 while employed in one outlet over the 4 month period of research. Formal institutional ethical approval was given to undertake a study of organizational romance at work, and all members of staff and managers were aware of her research. Interviews focussed on accounts, beliefs and experiences of sexual

relationships in the pub, as well as discussions of how sexual behaviour and relations were negotiated (see Riach and Wilson, 2007). Field diaries were kept of memorable accounts witnessed or discussed when working as well as recording the researcher's personal experiences. All the pubs under study were located in university-based city centres, a leisure space often defined by excess, socialising and possible danger, as well being a site for romantic 'hook ups' (Chatterton and Hollands 2002). Work was often physically demanding in terms of long shifts and activities such as changing kegs, restocking shelves and moving around furniture. The staff were expected to work at least one evening shift and one weekend shift a week (which could end at 3am in the late-night venues). Work that involved the explicit movement of bodies combined with the viscerality of the labour and customer exchanges taking place made this an ideal site for empirically exploring bodyspace.

The importance of space has been recognised as a key constituent of leisure service settings. Public houses have been historically positioned as holding important symbolic and physical locations within communities, as well as an identity resource for those who occupy them (Watson and Watson 2012). Pubs are often viewed as a mediator between work and home (Sandiford and Divers 2011), a 'third place' (Oldenberg 1999) or part of a subterranean leisure space where social conventions may be suspended or subverted (Measham 2004). All these factors have particular consequences for the nature of the labour experience in bars, as shown in Marshall's (1986) ethnography of 'Dixie's Place', which highlighted the intersections of work and leisure for bar workers in low-paid bar work. Of particular relevance to our study of Funtimes was the branding in themed pub chains. An increasingly important feature of high street hostelries in the UK, the use of themes such as 'The Irish Bar' or 'The student hangout' trades on the creation of spatial imaginaries that can be replicated and recognised across different town and cities (Muñoz et al. 2006).

Funtimes shared many of the characteristics of the service sector noted earlier and sexuality appeared to be an assumed presence. The staff make-up of Funtimes was often an equal ratio of men and women, predominantly part-time and drawn from the local student population. This resulted in an employee cohort described by staff as *in their dating prime* (Julie) and *footloose and fancy-free* (Linda). Most would regularly socialise after working hours, and there was an atmosphere where ‘banter’ between staff, often of a sexualised nature, was encouraged. For example, each individual had a key for the till which flashed up a pseudonym after every sale, with the name often changed to sexual references such as *goer*, *gagging for it*, or *Delmonte* (invoking a television advert with the phrase ‘the man who likes to say yes’). While Human Resource functions were centralised and covered basic legal dimensions, house managers usually had control over staffing, stock, and how promotions were marketed within the premises, all supported by national and regional incentives encouraging branches to be creative in how they increased turnover. This distance from Head Office was framed by managers as contributing to an informal culture. As one manager (Diana) stated: *the organization’s only presence is really the manager... I know most of my staff personally and like them - I think they don’t mind me! The district manager is hardly in and does not take a lot of time closely looking at what people are doing, but in an office, the managing director and upper manager might only be an office away*. This context was important to the way that the organization itself became an orientating device for particular modes of sexualised behaviours.

The body-dwelling of the researcher shaped the way sexuality was ‘grasped’ in this setting, through her experiences, histories and embodied presence. At the time of research, author 1 was a female PhD student in her twenties, and while attempting to question the assumptions

behind the flows of bodies, people and social interactions, inevitably, this reflexive commitment often slipped when serving customers at a busy bar, cleaning up, socialising with employees and, after the official completion of fieldwork, engaging in a relationship with another member of staff. Rather than detract from the findings, this emphasises the pervasiveness of what we call the ‘comfort of the line’; the idea that being orientated may bring security and contentment, albeit minding that the same orientation may marginalise other experiences, affordances or bodies. To this extent, the analytical discussions between author 1 and 2 were invaluable in attempting to denaturalise and identify the utility of various orientation objects in the production of knowledge itself. This reflexive process played a key part of the analysis, alongside the thematic analysis used to initially identify codes across interview transcripts and observational data. In highlighting connections and paradoxes that emerged between different codes or ideas, we then developed a phenomenologically-derived analytical toolkit to explore how instances such as motility, reconfiguration, in-placeness, situatedness, and extension created connections between bodies and the spaces that they occupied. This not only captured how experiences were accounted for when employees were discussing workplace relationships and sexual encounters, but the ways that bodies appeared to assume particular positions through paying attention to the ‘who’s, whys’ and what’s’ that appeared in the interview narratives. In order to capture the experience (and indeed, the seduction) of sexual orientation in the bodyspace of pub work in our findings below, we draw on excerpts of data alongside reflections from the field that to some extent evoke the sentiment of ‘confessional tales’ (van Maanen, 1988).

Findings

Bodyspace and Background

Similar to Measham's (2004) account of rave clubs occupying spaces primarily used for sporting events, different areas of the pub were transformed depending on the day of the week or time of night. These not only changed in terms of serving different functions, but also became occupied by different types of bodies with different intentions. Employees accepted the active creation of a seductive bar environment: lighting was dimmed at particular points of the evening, the volume and tempo of music played was changed, and candles were put on tables in some outlets on quieter weekday evenings. Certain tasks were also avoided in the evening, such as washing down units, even though these shifts could be quiet. While some day shift employees complained about the invisible labour that those on the evening shifts did not seem aware of, there was an acceptance that the customer did not want to be reminded of the grime and dirt since *someone scraping chewing gum off a table might be a bit of a passion killer* (Jack).

Many employees saw part of their job being to contribute to this atmosphere, for example, through flirting:

Any job that involves adult interaction and no children, you find a bit of banter veering towards sexual stuff, especially at night and especially when people are drunk – I used to work in a fast food restaurant and in the evening this happened, it's not just where people are drunk (Abby).

Everyone knows what the pub is like. You are part of the whole thing aren't you – I mean, people don't drink to be politically correct and polite – they drink to relax and get a shag! (reference to casual sex) *(laughs)* *So when you sell them a drink, in a way, you're making them feel more attractive – it's a laugh – there's always a bar separating you* (Ollie).

Employees' bodies and the way they created this atmosphere was clearly inherited from the particular setting in two ways. One aspect was derived from a larger history of pubs as being social spaces, including their own experiences of a pub. For example, some staff mentioned their parents first met in a pub while others talked about the importance of pubs in soap operas. Particular conditions of labour, such as being physically tired after working long evening shifts, or the need for a release due to the pressures of dealing with drunk, abusive or lewd customers, were also presented as fostering intimate or emotive discussions between staff. This background afforded the possibility for work-based sexual relations, since, as one participant put it *-there not such a definite line between pub or restaurant work because you are working where you socialise as well* (Fiona). Other participants referred to points of temporal blurring as contributing to the operability of sexual dynamics between staff; what Marshall (1986: 41) describes as the 'grey area' when employees are "at work but not working". This included clearing up after the bar was closed when they would have a drink while washing glasses, and shift changes; times where there was a blurring of labour and leisure. As one line manager indicated:

Running shifts as well – people all finishing at 5 o'clock and finish together and then they want to go to the pub ... especially in bigger pubs where you've got 5 or 6 people clocking off at the same time – it's more of a social thing (Brian).

Leisure therefore became an object which fore-grounded pleasure and the possibility for sexual relations to occur in locations where people had been primarily hired for their labour. Lucy suggested that *there are loads of after shift drinks sessions or staff nights out that lead to one night stands*. This background to pub work therefore became a way that

(exclusively heterosexual) “spaces can hence extend into bodies, just as bodies extend into space” (Ahmed, 2006a: 92). In other words, the pub background not only orientates the relations between bodies in ways that make particular modes of sexual relations possible, but the orientation itself becomes a means of “world-making” (Ahmed, 2006a: 115) - in this case, the world of the pub and how it was experienced as a site for sexual potential.

The pub background resulted in employees facing competing tensions in how they managed interactions with customers. Ethan suggested that *both male and female bar staff flirt and are flirted with by customers, it's just part of the job, I mean, it's part of the sales techniques at the end of the day*. However, while employees felt their sexuality contributed to their sense of ‘in-placeness’ in the pub, they did not want to fully submit to sexualised roles ascribed by managerial or customer orientations. One employee suggested it was possible to *be sexy, but if you're also assertive with it, people will respect you - and are more likely to give you a tip if I'm honest* (Ellie). Others suggested that they physically ‘shut down’ their bodies as sexually responsive in ways that made particular interactions (which may otherwise be viewed as sexually intimate in terms of physical proximity) inappropriate. Strategies included avoiding eye contact, folding their arms or turning their body away when they were talking to or moving in between customers. Customers who attempted to pull employees into the consumer sexualised space faced immediate repercussions, either through ejection from the premises or deliberately not being served by the rest of the team. When discussing such incidences, aspects of the labour were often evoked: *Just because you work in a pub, doesn't mean you have to put up with the drunken idiots- we get paid minimum wage and you wouldn't be expected to put up with it in a shop* (Mia). The porosity of the body that provides the world of potential, then, also lays out a set of objects that must be navigated. In this setting, the institutional and the personal appear to be manifested in negotiating different and

often competing orientations surrounding labour and leisure. When ‘what the customer wants’ serves to make the employees body vulnerable, or not felt as ‘at home’, organization or labour-based arguments were called upon to justify their sanctioning or mitigating behaviours.

Bodyspace and Bodily Dwelling

The relative homogeneity of the staff mirrored the target clientele: a majority of those working in the pub (including the managers) were white, young, able bodied, younger than 35, and consumed alcohol on a regular basis. While this homosocial element was rarely discussed, those not fitting the somatic structure were clearly made to feel ‘out of place’, as the researcher found through the derogatory comments made by staff after one man in his late 40’s enquired about a job advertisement in the pub window. On one level, the benefits of employing similar bodies that could be replaced and swapped in various work processes with relative ease was reflected in the swapping of shifts. However, the apparent neutrality or ascribed value surrounding these flexible’ bodies was questionable, revealed when one female manager complained to author 1 of having three shifts in one week where there were no men behind the bar. When asked why this was a problem, she gave three reasons: one was a Monday night when there were no bouncers employed until later; another was a night when a big football match was on and when bouncers would be working, but a busy bar with lots of men would make it hard to push through the crowds when glass collecting; and a third was because there would be no-one (i.e. a male member of staff, or partner of the female member of staff – all the employees on duty were single) present when locking up the premises.

As suggested in the example of shift swaps, ‘sexual orientation’ can be glimpsed in the materiality of what certain bodies stood for and the opportunities they are afforded, in this case, along gendered lines. On the one hand, there was a suggestion that their very male presence did something to create a particular space, such as ensuring no customers ‘tried it on’. All men, rather than any women were presented as embodying the potential to do something should they be ‘called into action’, such as customers fighting. Here we have an example of an essentialised concept of male and female difference, where the female is inherently vulnerable, as suggested in one manager’s description of women unsuccessfully trying to break up fights due to *their long hair, big hoopy earrings and boobs getting in the way* (Max). Bodily presentations were often conflated to create female comportment and assumptions about how they can inhabit space. This capability appeared to be connected with particular bodies and could even trump acquired skills. For example, one female employee was a black belt in a martial art, but still predominantly referred to as ‘small and cute’ by other staff and rarely called upon to undertake physical tasks such as changing kegs.

Despite this, the bodies on shift continued to be presented as ‘neutral’. Ahmed reflects on this apparent ‘neutrality’ when being stopped at airports because of her name: “ ‘Don’t take it personally.’ It isn’t about me of course. And yet it involves me... It might not be personal, but nor is it about ‘anyone’”. (Ahmed 2007: 162). Similarly, within the pub, the way particular bodily dwellings afforded particular spaces was not about the individual, but based on more nuanced lines of possibility. This fed back into how individuals appeared to think about their own capabilities as witnessed by author 1 through the repeated gendering of bodies in floor server (taking orders and bringing drinks to the customer’s s table) coordination. Working as a team, during busy periods, floor servers would pass each other with little acknowledgement apart from checking what part of the floor each was covering.

However, as soon as a fight broke out, female floor servers would quickly identify each other to try and mitigate the possibility of harm, whereas male floor servers or glass collectors would often move towards the disturbance.

The patterning of bodies correlated with the physical demands of the work to highlight the iterative process of space taking shape through bodies and vice versa. A key part of the job was moving between objects such as tables and bar counters, as well as negotiating dark dancefloors (where glass collection happened), and the narrow bar areas where up to 8 people would work on a busy Saturday night. By necessity workers' bodies bustled around each other in a choreographed sweaty 9 hour shift. The touching and interaction that occurred between with these bodies was often framed as creating some connectivity that in turn facilitated sexual relations. One employee, Tom, referred to this as *the shift effect* after noticing that those who 'got it on' on a staff social night had often worked together on a Friday night.

Bodily dwelling as an ontology of possibility also appeared to play out in the movement of bodies. This was most apparent in the areas of pubs where both customer and employees were simultaneously located. For example, if serving behind the bar, a place where customers could not go but may still 'view', employees would find out where they could stand that would enable them to see if anyone needed served but would simultaneously ensure they were 'hidden' from customers and therefore not required to make eye contact, small talk or be stared at. These themes were magnified in discussions of working the pub floor where the customers sat, stood or danced. While one of the male members of staff said *I expect it, to be groped on the floor* (Felix), a number of female bar staff undertaking floor service or bussing (collecting empty glasses) on busy weekend nights talked about actively choosing a route to

avoid large single sex groups, even if it took slightly longer to get to the required table. A number of staff also referred to using tables, chairs or other customers of the same gender who would be 'safe' (such as an older looking man or woman together or a small group of women), as barriers to avoid contact with other customers, which helped to prevent unwanted sexualised encounters. Gradually, through the bar staff moving in and out of the spaces a number of times, pathways would form and be left open – at least until new objects (in the form of new customers) came in. In this sense, how employees moved around the floor, and experienced moving about the floor highlighted that “the work of repetition is not neutral work; *it orientates the body in some ways rather than others*” (Ahmed 2010: 247). Undertaking these activities not only carved out space but in turn carved out what bodies were best suited to this space. The movement of the floor service was one example of a cartography based on the size, shape and style (in terms of movement) of the body which assumed its capabilities - in this case, speed and flexibility.

Ahmed (2006a: 9) suggests that space is not an exterior phenomenon but shapes and is shaped in the experience of dwelling, space acting like a “second skin”. This spatialising of a second skin materially manifested in Funtimes through clothing. For example, uniforms (t-shirts and shirts) were often the basis of a lot of discussion in both interviews and in day to day discussions amongst staff. Although one participant described uniforms as ‘a-sexual’ (Eva), in choosing the size of t-shirt, employees negotiated between wanting to ensure they were *sexy* enough (often to increase tips), *but not too pornographic* (Imogen). In another account, one employee spoke about wearing a padded bra to work. She was happy to laugh at comments made by other members of staff suggesting the padded bra increased tipping, an important way of gaining extra income. However, the bra also served to diminish the invasion of ‘accidental’ groping of touching from customers who she said would be touching the

material of the bra, rather than *contact with my actual boob* (Vicky). The padded bra was therefore a potent manifestation of the ambivalence of bodily dwelling. It allowed the employee to mitigate against the impact of feeling exploited or vulnerable due to being a body orientated as sexually available, but still positioned her as 'in-place' through shaping a sexually alluring body.

Spatial shaping of pub work thus melded with the value of different bodies and the ascribed capabilities derived through embodied inhabitance. While men's size and ability to 'impose' was important as a presence behind the bar, for women, being 'nippy' as floor servers assumed they could work faster, only temporarily 'imposing' themselves on the space. In both cases, not only were particular bodies "moved in a different way" (Ahmed, 2007: 162) to create organizational masculine and feminine orientations, but the imprint or shape created in space was inherently connected a particular form of body.

Bodyspace and Lines of Directionality

In the accounts of managers and employees, sexuality was often connected to the changes in functionality of different parts of a pub. Private functions could determine where staff were located, while furniture was often moved around to create different floor spaces during the week or weekend. Other accounts discussed incidences where one part of a bar closed and subsequently operated as an overflow cloakroom for the late-night bar customers. For employees this spatial flexibility also enabled the appropriation of other parts of the pub, transforming them from their primary function (which often revolved around mundane or unclean work activities such as where the spare kegs were kept) into spaces of erotic potential. For example, *going off to the toilets together* (Theo), *shagging on the pool table* (Declan) and *sex in the fire escape* (Lawrence) and other neglected parts of the pubs were

often mentioned, transforming certain functional objects into spaces of sexualised opportunity:

[In] one of the places I was working, one of my friends who I worked with was having an affair with her boss and he took her over the ice machine and when he came, he slipped out and came all over the ice! And it wasn't even cleaned – what about that? (Kate).

As Kate's account suggests, these incidences were often framed as transgressive in some way, using a workplace in a 'naughty' fashion. The 'christening' of various places or objects as connecting staff through initiation or ritualistic storytelling appeared to encode organizational spaces, and could be drawn upon as a means of cultural identification. However, rather than break any boundaries, these encounters may be read as confirming existing orientated possibilities for action for young, nubile bodies, which reproduced 'sexual orientations' already inscribed in the pub. Such spaces, then, did not only encourage certain modes of sexualised conduct, but also served to "take us in a specific direction" (Ahmed, 2006a: 112).

In other ways, these sexual encounters 'straightened themselves out' through an underlying expectation: that they could lead to a traditional coupling of individuals. Indeed, those who had worked in the pub for some time and formed the core of loyal staff (with the better shift patterns and different tasks oscillating around their preferences) were often part of longer-term couples. Those in couples were seen as creating a stable working environments in an industry where high turnover was common, whilst those who were single (or more precisely, 'not-yet-coupled'), pepped it up through gossip about their latest liaisons. However, the stories surrounding relationships were commonly referred to using romantic analogies:

I guess the best ones (inter-staff sexual encounters) are when people get together and live happily ever after (Matthew).

(A manager, Declan, referring to his girlfriend who also worked with him) *We were like the prince and princess of the pub.*

Within their accounts, aspirational assumptions of a long-term relationship suggest that the sexual act was more about what happened *after* the initial encounter, rather than the public performance of exclusive sexual relations. This may also explain why, despite sexual activity was seen as being ‘all around’, there was a surprising antipathy for actively displaying or publicly expressing intimate acts in front of others beyond communal flirting. In particular, employees suggested ‘gratuitous’ displays of sexuality were unacceptable, with one participant suggesting *If they (a couple) spend half their time behind the bar snogging and generally being lovey-dovey it can be quite annoying (Brian)*, while another suggested there was agreement in his work team that *we don’t want to see people giving each other tongues or anything (Theo)*.

In discussing inter-staff sexual relations, the gendering of sexual orientations was once again made visible, although only through accounts where the development of a relationship was prevented by the woman, not the man. This presumed relationships were desired mainly by women following traditional lines of coupling, and translated into female bar staff being orientated in different ways to men through the virtue of the female body being attached to expectations of ‘coupleness’. In stories surrounding affairs, many did not agree (and yet still acknowledged) that a woman could be seen as a *tart* (Erica) or *slut* (Eva) compared to men

being ‘studs’ – what could be viewed as an extension of an already dominant spatial orientation of masculinity. However, as Ahmed suggests in her critique of ‘whiteness’, the assumption of norms surrounding sexualised behaviour continued to rest upon normative modes of differentiation. For women it was intimately connected with inhabiting a female body, highlighting the way certain bodies are inculcated with lines of directionality pointing towards orientating devices such as ‘monogamy’. In doing so it served to re-inscribe what is possible, what is afforded, and what potential the self has to improve its capabilities through space, to the extent that “the woman’s body becomes the tool in which the man ‘extends himself’” (Ahmed 2006: 71)- in this context, sexual conquests feeding into ascription of virility and masculine prowess.

A reflective coda to this normative coupling process highlights the pervasiveness of these lines of directionality as being both bodily located and beyond particular bodies. Two years after the fieldwork was completed, and both the first author and her partner had left the pub, they returned for a visit and were retold the story of how they had first got together by a member of staff they had never met in person before. The way this was woven into the employee’s broader discussion of other ‘Funtime couples’ of past and present, provides a pertinent example of the enveloping of past experiences merging into a background of one particular setting. In turn, their relationship contributed to the orientation for current workers, this small footprint creating new bodyspaces in the present. With this broader reflection in mind, we now turn towards a wider discussion of the implications of our findings.

Concluding Discussion: (Dis)orientating the sexual body at work

In exploring bodyspace in a UK pub setting, this article has considered how orientation provides one aperture for understanding processes of sexual organizing in and between

objects, bodies and practices at work. It is of course important to take into account bodies as aestheticized and subject to organizational or ideological repertoires (e.g. Warhurst and Nickson 2009), but this perspective in isolation may underestimate spaces of activity and negotiation (Dale 2005). Likewise, previous research exploring sexuality in service work has mainly referred to space as influenced by discourses surrounding sexuality, rather than created in bodily situatedness (e.g. Filby 1992). In some senses, we betray Ahmed's commitment to queering sexuality, and perhaps may even be accused of reproducing the privileged heterosexual object. However, we would argue that while orientation may reveal the ways we are orientated towards heterosexuality, her theoretical apparatus also helps to interrogate how straightening may occur through orientating devices that shape bodyspaces into following particular modes of normative sexualised behaviour over others.

In some ways, the age cohort and tertiary status of our sample limits the study by presenting a particular form of sexuality which may be associated with 'youthful subjectivities' (McRobbie 1994: 192), with potentialities for expressions of sexuality altering across the lifecourse. However, just as participants in Watson and Watson's (2012) pub ethnography drew on the family histories of pub going, our employees inherited a background of expectations surrounding pub work. In the same way that Ahmed's writing table "waits for the body of the writer" (2010: 251), sexuality at work waits for bodies to coalesce and cohere, and subsequently imprint themselves on malleable organizational spaces. This not only shows the importance of lived experience as an ontological starting point, but also the need to keep the body specific to particular organizational settings. Similar to Erickson's (2004: 81) study of a restaurant, within the pubs we note that "the physical demands of the job and the closeness of bodies in space lend themselves almost inevitably to sexual play, producing an overtly sexualised workplace". Our study demonstrates how bodily situatedness is key here:

not only did the particular movement of bodies and objects within the pub influence the sexuality scripts played out in different arenas, as suggested by Corey (1986), but the very presence of bodies informed what was possible or not. Together with current experience, inherited backgrounds orientate and emerge in organizational cultural expectations, which in turn pendulate within bodies and through bodily action. This background may result in both sexualised banter increasing camaraderie and not being positioned as harassment, as suggested by Lerum (2004), or, in the case of Funtimes employees, the need to carefully negotiate the converging orientating devices surrounding experiences of labour and leisure.

Background also provided a shared sense of how bodies can or should move within a service setting that reproduced service expectations through matrices of gendered desirability. Moreover, to ensure efficiency of service, some bodies should be able to clearly ‘imprint’ themselves on the landscape of the workplace, while others must be fast, flexible and able to move across spaces of service. Space indexes sexuality, which is simultaneously experienced and reproduced. However, we would suggest that the consequences of ‘marking’ locations in particular ways (through sexual expressions or acts) in ways that cannot be read or interpreted within normative ‘sexual orientations’ may result in individuals themselves becoming ‘marked’ or marginalised. Just as Adkins (2000: 214) suggests that aesthetics surrounding lesbian styles may ‘fix’ the worker, in Funtimes, sexual behaviour deemed inappropriate may also serve to ‘straighten’ particular modes of sexual expression, allowing some behaviours to be seen as more possible or immediate than others, all of which are dependent on the body-specific.

It is clear then, that different bodies are orientated in different ways through embodied markings. However, sexual orientation also informs space through becoming “an effect of

how objects gather to clear a ground” (Ahmed, 2006: 87). In the case of our pub workers, what is distanced or perceived as possible only became apparent when practices or behaviours were ‘out of line’. Burrell (1984: 98) reminds us that “the body provides a whole variety of erotic possibilities, only some of which are morally prescribed by given societies at given points in time”. We would go further by suggesting these are not simply morally ascribed but bodily ascribed through the very way that we come to know the world. This is achieved in the recursivity inherent in bodyspace. Paraphrasing Ahmed’s use of the phrase ‘a path well trodden’ to ‘a space well trodden’ helps here, in that a space is “made by repeatedly passing over ground... we walk on the path (space) as it is before us, but it is only before us as an effect of being walked upon” (Ahmed, 2006: 16, text in brackets added). Bodyspace and subsequently sexuality, become known to us and naturalised only through repeated inhabitations, exchanges and embodied action.

In this regard, orientation provides theoretical possibilities for informing our understanding of organizational sexuality more generally. Just as Ahmed suggests that heterosexuality is formed by the refutation of alternatives, different heterosexual possibilities are afforded or evaporated by particular cultures, modes and styles of working. We should not forget that, like Monaghan’s (2002) bouncers, this communality of sexual potential was often an enjoyable experience for pub workers, and appeared to provide a sense of in-placeness: the comfort of the line. However, sexuality also throws us into the world through incarnate possibility. What is on our horizons of possibility is always experienced and perceived, or ‘orientated’ by the bodies we are. Locating sexuality at this conceptual level enables a richer gamut of sexual dynamics to be seen as at least theoretically possible whilst being sensitive to context and the situatedness of everyday working lives.

Our notion of bodyspace also brings to life Filby's (1992: 37) contention that sexuality cannot be viewed as operating outside circuits of labour, extending his point by conceptualising space as part of the connective tissue between sexuality and labour. To this regard organization are themselves orientation devices that steer bodies in ways that befit a particular organizational (and organizing) project. Indeed, as Ahmed suggests, "institutional spaces are shaped by the proximity of some bodies and not others: white bodies gather, and cohere to form the edges of such spaces" (Ahmed 2007: 157). It is often when an 'out-of-place' body – in our study the older job seeker, or the female martial arts expert - come on the horizon that the 'natural' may become noticeable. In this sense, interrogating sexuality in terms of orientation may help to make "the invisible marks of privilege visible" (2007: 149). Extending Brannen's (2005) account of sexualised relations between customers and call centre workers as following gendered lines of acceptability, our findings show how pub employees had overlapping consensus informing how they behaved with customers that not only shaped body choreography and space, but also fed into how they should 'be' at work. Not feeling 'at home', or 'in-place' with certain sexualised interactions (such with customers) suggests that being called into line through orientation is an inherent part of service work. This may be informed through backgrounds of labour, where division between labourer and consumer is subsumed into the working body as part of a capitalist mode of orientation. However, it also suggests that institutions do not just call on 'larger' orientations, such as 'whiteness' or 'sexuality', but also foster their own organizational-specific orientating devices which are conducive to their own labour project.

While the accounts discussed here may be specific to the setting, our analysis highlights how a pervasive sexual line of directionality may be in keeping us on the 'straight' - and consequently 'narrow' - in terms of a rather limiting mode of sexuality at work. For example,

it appeared significant that sexual behaviour could claim space through the ‘side-places’ of the pubs that were ignored or were back stage in the sense of not explicitly regulated through management practices. Rather than simply viewing these instances as gratuitous, the combination of events, stories, and the presence of couples working together play a key role in cohering the sexuality of employees in this particular setting as traditionally normative. Whilst intrinsically seductive, remembering sexual orientations as social rather than instinctual may open up new potentialities. Echoing Althusser, Ahmed states that “Yes, we are hailed; we are straightened as we direct our desire...the hope is to reinhabit the moment after such hailing...we hear the hail, and even feel its force on the surface of the skin, but we do not turn around, even when those words are directed toward us. Having not turned around, who knows where we might turn” (Ahmed 2006: 58). To this extent, we would suggest that future possibilities that may be afforded in exploring not simply sexual orientation, but the ‘disorientation’ of organizational sexuality and space, focussing on where we sustain our presence in the out-of-placeness and ‘deviant angles’ which occur.

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ⁱ In this article, the term ‘object’ is used in the phenomenological sense: things that point towards an action or calls us into action in some way. These are not only material, such as a table (Ahmed, 2006), but also “values, capital, aspirations, projects and styles” (Ahmed, 2006a: 84). Even a “speech act becomes an object, which gathers us around” (2007: 157)