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The Need for Fresh Blood: Understanding Age Inequality Through a Vampiric Lens

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Abstract

This article argues that older age inequality within and across working life is the result of vampiric forms and structures constitutive of contemporary organizing. Rather than assuming ageism occurs against a backdrop of neutral organizational processes and practices, the article denaturalizes (and in the process super-naturalizes) organizational orientations of ageing through three vampiric aspects: *(un)dying*, *regeneration* and *neophilia*. These dimensions are used to illustrate how workplace narratives and logics normalize and perpetuate the systematic denigration of the ageing organizational subject. Through our analysis it is argued that older workers are positioned as inevitable 'sacrificial objects' of the all-consuming immortal organization. To challenge this, the article explicitly draws on the vampire and the vampiric in literature and popular culture to consider the possibility of subverting existing notions of the 'older worker' in order to confront and challenge subtle and persistent monstrous discourses that shape organizational life.

Keywords: Ageism; Age Inequality; Discrimination; Monstrous; Older Worker; Organizational Culture; Vampire.

Introduction

> *The nosferatu do not die like the bee when he sting once. He is only stronger, and being stronger, have yet more power to work evil. The vampire which is amongst us is of himself so strong in person as twenty men, he is of more cunning than mortal, for his cunning be the growth of ages.*

Professor Van Helsing

Dracula (Stoker, 1897/2003: 252)

This article contributes to critical studies of organizational ageing by drawing on literary and cultural representations of the vampiric and the monstrous to offer a provocative analytical lens for redefining the relationship between the subject and organization. In doing so our conceptual aim is aided through the development of a monstrous theoretical vocabulary for the study of age inequality at an organizational level, providing new vistas through which to capture the lived experience of ageing and organization. Previous research has identified age inequality as something influenced through workplace interaction such as intergenerational contact (Iweins et al., 2013) or via social perceptions or norms connected to one's biological age, ability and competence (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2009; Radl, 2012). However, current studies fail to acknowledge how an experience of ageing at work may also be affected by competing organizational discourses and practices not so obviously or explicitly connected with chronological age. These may include, though not exclusively, ideals perpetuated around and through discussions of company tenure; whether one works in intergenerational teams; changing organizational, technological and economic contexts and expectations; how the past, present or future is valued and represented; or how the corporate image is nurtured and reproduced over time. All of these have the potential to influence how ageing at work may be understood, yet few attempts have been made to explore the dynamics of ageing inherent in such organizing practices. We contend that for these more subtle, persistent and insidious

dimensions of ageing to be investigated requires a different approach; one that can deliberately reveal, challenge and subvert the smooth production of the normal and natural in organizational life. Here we turn to what has recently been termed the 'monstrous' in the production of organization and organization theory (Thanem, 2006; 2011). Through this monstrous lens we investigate how the appearance of the 'natural' ageing subject at work and 'ordinary' organization is actively produced and made possible by the negation of its monstrous other. The particular monstrosity that we argue haunts (and so produces) accepted academic and practitioner discourses of ageing and organization is the shadowy presence of the (im)mortal vampire[1].

As we demonstrate, Bram Stoker's fictional character of Dracula provides a particularly powerful monstrous archetype through which to mobilize our analysis of immortality, age and organization. Stoker's urbane Count who must feed on the blood of the living to stay young and strong as he moves through the shadows of 19th century England is still our most common reference to vampirism in the western world. Yet just as Dracula represents all that is evil and malevolent about vampirism, a second major character of Stoker's novel, Professor Abraham Van Helsing, stands as his fearless, wise and elderly nemesis. Stoker's novel is valuable because it brings together these two opposing forces of the immortal seeking life through death, and the mortal aged hero seeking to save the lives of the innocent through the vanquishing of the immortal evil. Although Dracula remains the most prominent figure of Stoker's novel, it is arguably this dynamic between evil immortality and mortal hero that has given this story its own ability to sustain and regenerate over time. As Van Helsing's call to arms in the quotation above reminds us, the vampiric – as a particular expression of the monstrous – can lurk amongst us, in plain view, defying the passage of time by using up the life force of others; growing stronger and more cunning. Yet the vampire of fiction is not

a mindless killer: it too fears mortality, ageing and death, and so represents a more complex and morally ambiguous literary villain, monstrous other, and analytic device through which to study the organization of ageing.

We draw on representations of vampirism to ask whether organizations and their members are similarly caught up in a morally ambiguous relationship with ageing, (im)mortality, and the need to continually regenerate through the consumption of their human resources. Through the development of a vampiric lens, the article presents a way of exploring the organization-ageing dyad which challenges current studies of the 'older worker' as a phenomenon independent from the larger circuits of organizing principles constituting the workplace. Instead, we argue that current debates surrounding age and work ignore the possibility that age inequality may be a necessary driver in the machinery of modern day organizing. The article begins by framing existing debates in age and employment as an older worker 'problematic', arguing that the focus on this 'older worker' subject has neglected the complex dialectics between ageing and organizational life more generally. Here we introduce our vampiric lens to highlight how this dialectic might be better understood as a process of the organization 'feeding off' (and so growing stronger from) the constitution and legitimization of age inequality. Three overarching characteristics of vampirism inspired by its many historical, mythical, literary and cultural manifestations are then deployed to explore and further explicate the organizational vampirics-ageing subject dialectic. These characteristics include: 1) *undying* and the vampire's precarious hold on immortality; 2) *regeneration* and the need to draw life from others; and 3) *neophilia* as the vampiric fetish for the 'new' and the vitality of youth over the old and supposedly depleted. We conclude by arguing for an analytical interrogation of age inequality beyond an immediate focus on the 'older worker' subject, moving towards a more complex appreciation of age inequality as

endemic to work in the new economy; an economy that often holds an ambivalent view of the ageing worker as both a resource and a financial drain or threat.

Reconfiguring the 'Older Worker' Problematic

As the 21st century global marketplace continues to dip in and out of recession, some commentators have argued that the Global Financial Crisis may open up space for employers looking for experienced (conflated with 'older') workers to bring stability to the market (Mountford, 2010). However, it appears that historical trends are repeating themselves as those aged 50-64 are more likely to be made redundant, as well as face longer periods of labour market inactivity. To take the example of the UK, a significant percentage of those in receipt of incapacity welfare programmes are over 50, whilst statistics show that unemployment and labour inactivity has risen over the past 12 months amongst the 50-64 year olds (DWP, 2011a). Recent figures also suggest that early retirement (often defined as those retiring before state pension eligibility) is once again increasing after a period of higher labour market participation, with 1.57 million people under 65 classified as 'retired' in the UK – the highest figure in this cohort since 1993 (ONS 2011). Despite a running theme of 'Work First' in government initiatives for the over 50s to challenge the trends for non-work becoming a de facto retirement (OECD, 2006), it appears that the economic downturn has resulted in a return to type in terms of older workers marginalisation in the labour force. This begs the question, is there something inherent in the way organizations are constituted that nurtures or even creates age inequality?

For Phillipson (2003), one of the leading scholars in critical gerontology, older age marginalisation is not only apparent in empirical studies of age but also evident in the relative lack of theorizing of ageing and age discrimination in general. Since this assertion, there has

been a number of studies exploring the impact of labour market trends on older worker disadvantage as well as identifying perceptions that may result in ageist practice. Research has recognized the impact of culture, occupational stereotypes, and ideologies surrounding age as contributing to age inequality in the workplace and labour market in general (e.g. Rudman, 2006; Author 1a), as well as the influence of organizational policies and practices surrounding retirement decisions (Shacklock and Brunetto, 2005; Buyens et al., 2009). Yet studies rarely call into question whether organizational dynamics that are not explicitly connected to age may influence older worker inequality and there is still a dearth of relational research exploring the connection between localized behaviour surrounding ageing and employment, and larger systems of organizing. Those few exceptions such as Ainsworth and Hardy's (2008; 2009) work on older worker identities, McMullin and Marshall's (2010) study of ageing IT workers, and Trethewey's (2001) analysis of ageing women at work highlights the significance of social discourses on professional expectations surrounding ageing. Yet at the same time, there has been a hesitance from age and employment scholars to explore the relationship between age, broader organizational dynamics and the experience of work.

Beyond academia, the groundswell of recent debates surrounding older-age inequality has no doubt been a reaction to larger social and political narratives. The need to address the 'demographic time bomb' is now a well heralded battle call within policy and social arenas across the developed world. Figures by the OECD (2006; 2007) show that the speed at which a top heavy demographic emerges will accelerate in the coming 40 years. By 2050, the old age dependency ratio in developed countries will go from 27% in 2000 to 47% in 2050 (United Nations, 2007) with UK economists suggesting over 7 million people in the UK have inadequate savings for retirement (Banks et al., 2005). This has provoked a range of reactions

from government bodies, including gradually raising the state pension age and proposed systems for default pension saving (Pensions Act, 2007; 2008; DWP, 2011b). At the same time, the introduction of incentives to prolong labour market activity and legislation prohibiting age discrimination in employment in 2006 has sought to emphasize that those who wish to continue work are welcome in UK workplaces. However, despite such gladiatorial rhetoric surrounding conquering the 'ageing problem', both statistical and in-depth studies of the workplace still show those aged 50 or over face disadvantage, discrimination and exclusion both in accessing and participating in the paid labour market. Commentaries also suggest that little has changed surrounding the way older workers are viewed in terms of labour market commodities, whilst there is still a lack of appreciation of the diversity of the current 'older worker' cohort (Vickerstaff, 2010). It is within this tsunami of facts, figures, policies and practices that an older worker problematic is usually constituted.

Arguably this older worker problematic shapes the way we think, manage, and research ageing at work by inherently promoting or silencing certain subjects, themes or possibilities. Talk of age inequality often invokes particular positions such as the 'perpetrator' who espouses ageist views, the 'government' or 'manager' who is responsible for coordinating or promoting best practice, the homogenous 'ageing population' and the 'victim' – an older worker (usually those aged 50-65) who is the target of discrimination or ageist perceptions. Exploring problems of age through this passive and pessimistic manifestation of the older worker often assumes that the 'source' of age inequality is simply orbits in an around this limited organizational population. It also encourages a slippage where we assume that any solution will implicate the older worker themselves. To some extent, it is implied that manifestations of ageing should therefore be challenged, resisted or overcome by the

individual, as implied 'active/productive ageing' policies (e.g. Rudman and Molke, 2009). The paradox of this problematic is that age inequality simultaneously situates itself as occurring *in* organizations whilst at the same time positioning such inequalities as not related to organizing principles of work. In contrast to political economy of ageing debates which critique state and macro dynamics for marginalizing the elderly (Estes, 1979; 2001), the questioning the ageist nature at the level of organization has thus far remained curiously absent in debates surrounding age inequality – at least beyond its portrayal as a neutral catalyst through which attitudes can be transformed. As such, the underlying logics that drive organizational life have enjoyed a lack of critical scrutiny. In order to make this departure from a focus on age *per se* to an alternative form of critical analysis thus requires a different conceptual toolkit.

Beyond Monstrous Metaphors and Towards a Vampiric Lens

Analogies, myths and tropes have long provided a lens through which we can untangle the complexities that shape the world of work and organization (Alvesson and Spicer, 2011; Chandler, 2012; Godfrey, Jack and Jones, 2004; Grant and Oswick, 1996; Morgan, 1986; Oswick, Keenoy and Grant, 2002). Metaphor in particular has become a powerful means of interrogating forms of organizing. One reason for this may be that individuals rely on a conceptual schema to make sense of the world – a conceptual schema that itself is largely metaphorical and based in fantasy (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Similarly, metaphors can help researchers to weave together analyses of the construction of everyday organizational life that may often be either taken-for-granted or subsumed within established norms, rituals and daily routines. Whilst their use in academic studies has been subject to critique (e.g. Oswick et al., 2002), organizations and organizational processes have been brought to life through a variety of metaphors as diverse as jazz (Hatch, 1999), machines (Morgan, 1986) and safari parks

(Heracleous and Jacobs, 2008), providing a way of resurfacing underlying systems of belief. Within this metaphorical tradition, drawing on the macabre has already usefully deployed monstrous analogies including devils, freaks, cyborgs, zombies and cannibalism (e.g. Bloomfield and Vurdubakis, 1999; Rehn, 2009; Rehn and Borgerson, 2005; Thanem, 2006; 2011). Such images serve to remind us that organizations are not only the sites for mistakes or accidental disasters, but that they also have 'dark sides' that nurture deliberate corruption, misconduct and dishonesty (Linstead et al., 2010; Vaughan, 1999). It seems apt then that to explore age inequality, we may draw on a similarly monstrous figure to interrogate the organizational perversion of ageing and growing older: *the vampire*.

Like many mythical monsters, the contemporary figure of the vampire is a composite of historical, mythical, literary and popular cultural sources and influences (Asma, 2009; Barber, 1988). Although the term 'vampire' has something of an uncertain etymology, based as it is in French, German and Serbian languages (Barnhart, 2006), its other name *nosferatu* has a more traceable and, for our purposes, relevant history. The Greek word *nosophoros* meaning 'disease bearer' is thought to be first used in a historical legal case from 1725 involving a Serbian plague victim who is supposed to have risen from the dead and terrorized villagers at night by visiting their bedsides and draining their life force while they slept. The villagers responded by exhuming the body of the peasant and driving a stake through his heart (see Barber, 1988; Bunson, 1993). An alarmingly similar event was reported recently by Romanian national news in a small village in Dolj County where a suspected vampire was exhumed from the grave, its heart removed, burned, and the ashes mixed with water and drunk by locals in a bid to destroy the vampire and free the villagers of its evil spell (BBC, 2004). Such accounts of vampirism demonstrate the power of this particular mythical monster

to create fear in both the cultural imagination *and* everyday social reality. More significantly, both cases also illustrate that vampirism goes beyond metaphor.

This is perhaps why Bram Stoker combined the factual and the fictional in his own vampiric creation. A synthesis of the historical and folkloric provided the basis for the Count[2], extending the vampiric to embody all that was forbidden and repressed for 19th century English society: the erotic, the sexually promiscuous, and the popular fear of transmittable disease and death (Bentley, 1972; Frayling, 1991). However, where the Count represented all that was forbidden and abject, his nemesis Professor Abraham Van Helsing captured the optimistic and hygienic Enlightenment sensibilities of the Victorian aristocratic elite. Van Helsing was educated and something of a polymath, specializing in medicine, law and the occult as well as a number of other academic disciplines (Stoker, 1897/2003: 122). He was also depicted as wise, warm and caring, but ready to act when necessary – even when this meant mutilating the bodies of the Count's victims to save their souls (Wolf, 1972). As such, Stoker's tale was as much a social commentary as it was horror story. His vampire was also more than a vicious amoral killer. Instead, Dracula has his own history as a great king, politician, business man, and alchemist, as well as a range of important attributes including: immortality; the need to feed on blood; the power to defy and reverse the effects of age; transmogrification; and inhuman physical strength. But like any good fictional villain the Count also suffered from inherent weaknesses, such as the inability to enter a home without an invitation; the need to sleep during the day; an aversion to garlic; holy water; sacred Christian artefacts; and death through staking, decapitation and fire.

All these qualities gave Stoker's vampire a strong resonance with the romanticism of the day by drawing attention to the limits of Enlightenment thinking through the shadowy world of

folklore, tradition, archaic ritual, sexual taboos, and body horror. Moreover, Count Dracula and Professor Van Helsing provided a powerful narrative template for heroes and villains of vampiric and demonic stories for generations to come. In fact, Stoker's original vampire was so complete in its realization that the symbolic meaning of these qualities has been thoroughly absorbed into 20th and 21st western cultural imagination with only minor changes and additions along the way[3]. In contrast, however, the character of Van Helsing has fared less well, as the aged and wise polymath has since been depicted in a variety of guises as a younger and more dashing hero in the *Hammer* films starring Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee, and the less well received Hollywood film *Van Helsing* starring a muscle-bound Hugh Jackman in the starring role. Often the Van Helsing character is removed altogether to be replaced by bumbling religious fanatics as in George Romero's *Martin*, or by imposters as in Tom Holland's *Fright Night*, or by more aesthetically appealing teenage heroes and heroines as in novels, films and television series' such as *The Lost Boys,* the *Twilight Saga*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The Vampire Diaries*. In short, where the figure of the vampire has gained immortality, youth, and good looks through new forms of cultural regeneration, his aged nemesis has struggled to survive the passage of time. Ironically, it could be argued that it is Van Helsing's age and unflinching moral purpose that seems to have made him seem outdated, less appealing and a less complete heroic figure. However, a vampire without a vampire killer does not work in fiction and so the two are bound together as part of our collective cultural fascination with the *vampiric*. Indeed, it is this rich mixture of historical fact, myth, social commentary, and cultural reproduction that should alert us to the dangers of reducing the vampiric to metaphor and so miss the function of these demonic and heroic figures as containers for economic, social and sexual desires and anxieties which still hold currency today.

Through Stoker's novel and the many adaptations made since, the vampire provides an uneasy space through which the forbidden, the feared, the abject and the unspoken can be given form and voice. It should come as no surprise then that the many incarnations of the vampire are seducers, sexual predators, carriers of infection, or monsters seeking sympathy and redemption (Hindle, 2003a; Keyworth, 2002). Similarly, this more direct and non-metaphorical connection with vampirism has been called upon in various academic commentaries. For example, Haraway (with Goodeve, 2005: 150) views vampires as 'vectors of category transformation' to illuminate the symbolic significance of blood in narratives of kinship. Elsewhere the vampiric has been studied in terms of sexuality and gender (Bentley, 1972; Showalter, 1992), while the 'Vampire State' has served as a catchy title for a number of popular economic commentaries (e.g. Block, 1996; London and Rubenstein, 1994). Within this terrain, a range of scholars in the social sciences have specifically used vampires and vampirism as a means of challenging the sanitized view of organizations and society (Parker, 2005). At the cornerstone of this tradition is of course Marx, where correlations between the conditions of work and the vampiric describe the process through which industry 'sucks out' the capital of living labour (the working class), and combines it with 'dead' labour (machinery) to produce value (Baldick, 1987; Neocleous, 2003). Stating that 'the vampire will not lose its hold on him so long as there is a muscle, a nerve, a drop of blood to be exploited' (Marx, 2007[1867]: 330), the motif of life, blood and vampires runs throughout Marx's opus. In particular, he argues that 'Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the labourer works, is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has purchased of him' (2007[1867]): 257). However, as we have argued, what is missing from these vampiric accounts is the hero, the aged mortal vampire hunter of Stoker's novel that can understand and challenge the powers of the undead. Here we suggest taking the

vampiric beyond these totalizing monstrous metaphors to examine how visions of immortality and regeneration gain their power only when they are opposed by the inevitability of ageing, death and decay.

Organizational Vampirics

We contend that the vampiric represents an important non-metaphoric expression of the monstrous that may help us to better understand organizational age inequalities in new and potentially provocative ways. However, as Thanem (2006; 2001) demonstrates, a monstrous organization theory is not one concerned with monsters *per se*, but with how the possibility of monstrosity has always served to organize and so normalize and naturalize those unknowable aspects of ourselves and the world around us. For pre-Enlightenment societies monsters were signs or omens from God or the spirit world, whilst for 18th and 19th century science, the monster provided a means for scientific exploration and categorisation as the magical was subsumed into the medical. However, in both cases, the monster was - and still is - a present and essential (albeit marginalized) actor in the production of the 'age of organization' (Hoskin, 1995; Thanem, 2011). It is here that the vampiric – as a particular expression of the monstrous in organization theory and practice – allows us to similarly disrupt existing boundaries between organization and age; the corporeal and the organizational (Cooper, 2007); and the production of the current 'older worker problematic'. In what follows we contend that a vampiric analysis of organization can be approached through the following shared characteristics: 1) *(un)dying* and the vampire's obsession with immortality; 2) *regeneration* made possible through the act of feeding off others; and 3) *neophilia*, the fascination with the new, the innocent and virginal – a theme that has become a staple of contemporary vampire fiction. These three elements highlight the principles through which monstrous organizational discourses constitute, manage, and defer their own mortality. In

turn, they also shape appropriate discourses of ageing for those located within the spaces and boundaries that make up the organs of the organizational body. Throughout our analysis we will draw on Bram Stoker's original text *Dracula* as a reference point to the features and characteristics of vampirism in popular culture. Quotations used to frame our analysis and develop our vampiric lens are therefore taken from the diary entries of the protagonists in Stoker's 1897 novel.

1) *Organizational (un)dying*

> *The vampire live on, and cannot die by mere passing of the time; he can flourish when he can fatten on the blood of the living. Even more, we have seen amongst us that he can even grow younger, that his vital faculties grow strenuous, and seem as though they refresh themselves when his special pabulum is plenty.*

<div align="right">

Professor Van Helsing

Dracula (Stoker, 1897/2003: 254)

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During the peak of the global financial crisis in 2007-2008 the collapse of Lehman Brothers sent shockwaves around the financial world, whilst the 'high street institution' Woolworths, a retailer established for over 100 years, disappeared from UK town centres. The media accounts accompanying these events carried sombre tones – derelict buildings, empty offices and office workers in a state of shock, sitting on pavements with a box of belongings beside them. These examples of 'organizational death' are seen to provoke reactions of grief, loss and mourning in a similar way to those experienced following the death of a person or other living thing and may even provoke individuals to question their own mortality (Sutton, 1987). Consequently, in high modernity, the rise in debates over the fluidity of identities and the experience of work suggests that organizations should provide us with our overarching sense

of meaning. However, if organizations seek to provide us with the totality of meaning, they must simultaneously create an unshakable alter at which to worship.

The way that organizational failures are played out in social spaces reveals how we are conditioned into thinking of organizations as immortal entities. As argued by Sievers (1994:13), whilst individuals must submit to the inevitability of their own mortality, the primary task of an organization is to ensure the immortality and continuance of the firm. Organizational cultures produce this (im)mortality illusion created through the symbolic incarnation of its member's collective immortality, with the spirit of the individuals living on in their 'creations'. Manifestations of this range from statues of notable leaders and founders (Nakamaki, 1995) to myths of Walt Disney being cryogenically frozen under Disneyland (Van Maanen, 1991). To this extent, it may be argued that organizations cannot die. Moreover, they offer the possibility of the materiality of ones existence to be overcome by the continuance of, for example, cultures, or the autobiographies and memories of managers and leaders: immortality that has been created in the organization that exist within the minds of the employees.

The importance of this organizational dimension is transferred through a range of mechanisms. In particular, in the increasingly aestheticized experience of the workplace, workers are not only required to uphold organization principles but ensure such values are effectively written on their bodies, effectively making them 'organizational artefacts of the organization' (Hancock and Tyler, 2000: 120). Those who are perceived as failing to represent such organizational immortal aspirations become vulnerable as they serve as a potent reminder of mortality, degradation, despair and depletion (Martens et al., 2005: 227). The image that is synonymous with the older worker may embody what organizations are

continually trying to avoid: the old, worn-out, out-of-date, unfit parts of an organization that need to be replaced or hidden in some way. This may be exacerbated through intersections with gender, as shown in Moore's study of women over 50 where one respondent suggested: "I worry that perhaps they want a dolly bird sitting on the reception and I'm not. I mean that's why I change, different suits on every day, it's to try and deal with that issue, that I feel I look the part, there's nothing I can do about myself" (Moore, 2009: 662). There is of course a deep irony in this for those effectively 'made' older by the strains of organizational life. Long hours, stressful environments and work-hard-play-hard cultures all serve to exacerbate the creation of an aged self. In this sense, as Van Helsing warns above, the older worker represents the disposable body that the vampiric organization has grown fat on; the object that has been sacrificed to provide the nutrition that ensures organizational success and renewal. Whilst Sievers (1994) sees no discrimination in which worker the firm chooses to 'sacrifice', the increase of 31% in UK age discrimination cases on the previous year (Ministry of Justice, 2011) suggests that older workers are most likely to be the sacrificial object in times of downsizing or streamlining of workforces when organizations need to fend off or defer their own mortality.

2) *Regeneration*

> *The blood is the life! The blood is the life!*

R.M. Renfield

Dracula (Stoker, 1897/2003: 152)

In order to remain immortal, the organization must find ways to regenerate. As 'the organization' has no corporeality of its own, it must gain temporary form, sustenance and vitality through a manipulation of the bodies of others. In Stoker's novel, the Count and his three female vampire accomplices must feed on the blood of the living to renew their

strength, and through this suspend and even reverse the effects of the ageing process. For the vampire, then, it is the life blood that is central to their survival. By comparison for his accomplice Renfield, it is the living bodies of smaller creatures that are a potential source of immortality. In Stoker's novel, R.M. Renfield is an inmate in Dr Seward's insane asylum and a servant of the Count. Renfield is not a vampire, yet it is intimated throughout the novel that he one day hopes to become one. His vampiric purpose, then, is not merely to feed in order to survive, but to show a willingness to commit acts of manipulation and murder to demonstrate his loyal servitude in furthering the Count's vampiric agenda. Renfield also does not feed on humans, but instead consumes the life force of smaller creatures. Beginning with flies, he works his way up the food chain to birds and rats. However, unlike the Count who gains vitality and freedom with each new conquest, Renfield soon faces a very mortal problem in that with each vampiric act he gradually loses a part of his humanity, his sanity, and eventually his life. For our purposes, Renfield represents a subtle and powerful organizing feature of vampiricism.

Similarly, organizational regeneration must also be based on a successful mix of morally ambiguous ideas, values, and resources that are both palatable to the customer and will seduce and motivate key stakeholders. Regeneration is central to this aim, as seen in the temporal manipulation created through corporate branding strategies that create a historical composite image of a long time trusted friend and companion rather than a masterful instrument of exploitation and consumption. Multinational organizations seek to attract new clientele by making the company appeal to the hearts and minds of the consumer. For example, department store John Lewis' *Through the Ages* (2011) television campaign shows 7 vignettes of music products since the 1960s to present day with the tag line 'We've always been there for the latest thing'. At the same time, products are required to embrace new

technologies, trends or fashions in order to maintain market share. Another example is 'retro-reinvention' (Lowe, 2002), a melting pot of the rhetoric, myth and vision which come together in order to revitalize a particular idea or concept. This amalgamation of old and new is key to rebranding initiatives impacting on a range of stakeholders inside the company (Hatch and Shultz, 2003). However, regeneration may similarly be witnessed in attempts by companies to 'shake themselves up' by changing structures, policies and locations to symbolize a fresh era of a company, or prevent employees and consumers from 'growing tired' of the existing brand.

Similar sentiments of regeneration are found in larger discourses surrounding age which have been heavily correlated with workplace ageing and retirement, such as 'active ageing' (Moulaert and Biggs, 2013). 'Active ageing' has become a mainstay of policy within the World Health Organization (2002) and European Commission (2012), encouraging older individuals to take responsibility for their healthier lives (Walker, 2009) and thus ignoring, for example, the increase in occupational illnesses during the life course due to work intensification in the new economy. The spirit of reinvention and remaining 'productive' is clear here (Rudman and Molke, 2009), as is the idea that rejuvenation is possible through an increasing preoccupation with battling the ageing process. Yet evidence suggests that at a workfloor level, older workers are subject to the idea that time is indeed running out for them, resulting in a lack of investment in development opportunities. A more general emphasis on the 're' also has consequences for the older worker. Re-cycling, re-born, re-duce, re-charged, is also evident in new consumption-influenced forms of working which serves to move away from a traditional age/career trajectory and towards one that is marked by sharp periods of change, transformation and displacement. Traditional constructions of ageing have often supported conceptions of career paths and roles in the workplace: for example,

apprenticeships and mentoring have long carried age assumptions where a tolerance (rightly or wrongly) has been aligned with age-related expectations. In contrast, trends within high modernity have disrupted assumptions that chronological age should matter. However, contrary to freeing older workers from the binds of stereotypes or expectations, the seduction of an 'ageless' society (Andrews, 1999) closes down spaces for a diversity of ageing. Cosmetic surgery and biomedicine subvert the 'natural' decline, whilst 'third age entrepreneurs' and 'silver start up' businesses promoting the image of an individual who possesses an accumulated skillset but still embodies energy and embraces change. In other words, the individual must be able to regenerate themselves in order to stay 'relevant'.

Like Renfield seeking to consume a multitude of living creatures to prepare himself for the immortality promised by his vampiric master, organizational members may similarly seek to regenerate and revitalize themselves, seduced by the idea that liberation can be found in the consumption of a range of anti-ageing organizational discourses, products and practices. Shadows of this seductive consumption where one can suspend the temporal spectre of growing older are also found in the used of fitness discourses in the financial sector (author 1), or the expectations of knowledge workers, as discussed in Costea et al.'s (2007: 170) study of 'organized' fun. Here, fun becomes one example of securing efficiency and productivity through the promotion and consumption of activities that purport to uphold 'the anticipation of life with no foreseeable end, or, at least, promising endless youth through a perpetually preserved and active "inner child"'. Similarly, sabbaticals, gap years and unpaid planned periods of leave are increasingly advocated as an antidote for burn-out, stress or recuperation (e.g. Gaziel, 2006), all representing a cost effective way of assigning responsibly to the employee who will bring themselves back to maximum productivity through the active consumption of new forms of 'life giving' products, packages, techniques, and choices. The

problem lies, however, in the denial of mortality that persists through these organizational strategies, brands, and policies. As workers are increasingly encouraged to buy into a vampiric organizational discourse of regeneration, the possibility for any acknowledgement of the ageing and mortal body is negated or denied. Instead, workers can either be useful (and so youthful) vampiric accomplices, or old, depleted and potentially disposable mortal resources.

3) *Neophilia*

> *Flesh of my flesh; blood of my blood; kin of my kin; my bountiful wine press for*
> *a while; and shall be later on my companion and my helper.*

<div align="right">

The Count addressing Mina Harker

Dracula (Stoker, 1897/2003: 306-7)

</div>

As with regeneration, this final feature of our vampiric lens, the drive for survival, often relies on a quest for continuous improvement, tighter processes and more efficient practices. The gory bedroom scene described in Stoker's novel in which the Count forces Mina Harker to consume his blood – thus beginning her vampiric transformation – suggests that vampirism is not just about consuming the life force of others, but rather of making sure that there is also a new generation; a new vital and complicit body of men and women who can continue on and sustain the (im)mortal organization. This neophiliac dimension is an essential part of organizational life, one recently discussed as not simply a practice surrounding branding or marketing but one endemic in the way organizations actually function (Rhodes and Pullen, 2010). However, within these practices, a tautology emerges where the newly introduced initiative, innovation and practice are of less importance than the search for the new and novel in and of itself. This results in the primary task of organizational life being to constantly create the new, rather than a focus on the existing. Such dynamics are of course

intrinsically tied in with the concepts of death and regeneration as key drivers of contemporary organizations. Rather than providing a foundation upon which to develop or improve the organization, practices such as change management– like the Count's attempt to transform the young Mina Harker – are processes marked by a continual search 'for the new in order to reproduce the same' (Böhm, 2006: 91).

Neophilia of course assumes that there will be a tomorrow to embrace. In this sense, the new, like the vampire, cannot exist by itself but feeds off the past and fears for the future. As Godfrey et al. (2004) note, the Marxist vampire upholds a temporal tension that is both fearful of (but driven by) the erraticism and unknowing of where the next supply of fresh blood will come from. This constant search for new supplies is driven in part by an unknowing of what the future will bring. Organizations thus create then engorge the present for fear that the future may never come. Basing organizational behaviour on 'how to be, and, perhaps even more significantly, what to become' (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2004: 169) provides an important source of ontological security in itself by assuring us that 'we have a future' (Linstead and Brewis, 2007: 365), making individual actors complicit in reproducing its importance. The future in its promise of the new is thus a resource that is privileged in organizational life and in turn undermines the past and those who may symbolize or embody the past. In this framing, organizational memory and experience is potentially a dangerous 'commodity' to hold, particularly if those memories are seen by the organization as something that needs to be erased. With the increased speed of organizational life producing a neophiliac environment where 'an obsession with the new – new identities, new bodies, and new faces – is a retreat from death – resistance to the inevitable personal and organizational ageing and decline' (Rhodes and Pullen, 2010: 3), the outcome for older workers may be a higher likelihood of losing their jobs during organizational restructuring through, for

example, redundancy or early retirement initiatives (Campbell, 1999; Samorodov, 1999). The manipulation towards a 'constant presence' and cult of newness may also result in a lack of space for employees to think about their own individual futures within an organizational setting. Studies suggest that whilst there are increasing concerns at a fiscal level surrounding retirement and pensions, discussions of financial planning are increasingly privatized (Kemp and Denton, 2003; Biggs, 2001). At the same time as work time is increasingly taken up in thinking of organizational futures, it appears resources, planning or discussions surrounding long-term career or work-retirement transition strategies concerning an individual's future are becoming relegated or compromised in organizational talk.

Such organizational trends also rely on wider discourses surrounding old and new. The denigration of being 'old' has traditionally been set up against 'young' to the extent that youth becomes a superlative that is conflated with beauty and truth (Wilkinson and Ferraro, 2002; Bytheway, 1995). In doing so, youth is not only seen as a key to happiness, but the very *essence* of happiness (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1993). Similar vampiric fictions such as Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Grey* (1891) reproduce values ascribed to youth and ageing that reach far beyond myth and literature and support the neophilic desire inherent in organizational life (see Hindle, 2003a). Whilst characteristics stereotypically ascribed to older workers may appear positive, such as maturity, security and experience, the extent to which these are valued as a perceived business benefit in today's highly-competitive market is questionable. In contrast, characteristics often associated with younger workers such as flexibility, adaptability and energy are similar to essentialist typologies of successful organizations … and vampires[4]. Passing references in critical commentaries suggest this is indeed the case: Parker (2000: 199) draws on Bates' (1994: 149) work on change to identify 'the elders' as 'pursuing defensive, stability orientated strategies', whilst the younger

members were seen as 'champions of change'. It is of little surprise then that neophilia translates into preferences for younger employees. For example, Lyon et al. (1998) present a bias within human resource management in its preference for 'green' workers' who will espouse organizational wide culture, whilst O'Brien (2010) suggests older workers are often relegated to been positioned as a 'reserve army' of labour who work for social, rather than economic need (Author 1b). Elsewhere, the increase in professional services across the Western world has made the intervention of crack teams of groomed, wrinkle-free consultants from one of 'the big four' professional services increasingly common: individuals who are parachuted in and out of the company wither neither a history nor a personal footprint. Either way, there is always an assumption of a fresh supply of labour.

Discussion: From Older Worker to Mortal Organizational Subject

I am old. My legs are not so quick to run as once; and I am not used to ride so long or to pursue as need be, or to fight with lethal weapons. But I can be of service; I can fight in other way. And I can die, if need be, as well as younger men.

Professor Van Helsing

Dracula (Stoker, 1897/2003: 377)

If we are seduced into the promise of 'eternal life' through the organizations we work for, it is perhaps unsurprising that we are also complicit in the reproduction of forms of organizational vampirism. The combined forces of immortality, regeneration and neophilia encapsulates a denial of death and decay that is subtle or even hidden but endemic. As Böhm (2006: 91) suggests, 'celebrated by modern reproduction technologies are positive notions of progress and newness that produce shocks that make the subject docile'. However, conversely, organizations rely on active and creative individuals for their continued existence. Organizations are not a life force in themselves: they cannot become vampiric

without our participation and so rely on those within and surrounding the organizational sphere to (re)vitalize the organization over time. This occurs in a number of ways: materially, through working long hours; symbolically, by recognizing and locating themselves in organizational spaces; and religiously, in their dedication and devotion to the corporate goal. Creating an asymmetrical reliance results in a co-dependent and yet unequal relationship between (im)mortal organizations and ageing workers, just like vampires and their victims, thus becoming locked in a co-dependent and yet unequal relationship. Here, the organizational subject as accomplice or victim is either seduced by untold promises or hypnotized into submission, whilst the vampiric organization requires a continual supply of fresh blood in order to sustain its semi-existence. As we have argued, Renfield represents an intriguing character in vampire mythology in that he is a human servant of the vampire; an ambiguous figure who may be under a hypnotic spell or a lucid and willing instrument of the Count's wishes, or both. In this way, Renfield reflects the position of all organizational members as trapped at this (im)mortal intersection; between the desires and promises of the vampiric organization and the lived reality of the mortal and ageing body. Our proposition of a vampiric lens for understanding age and organization therefore poses serious questions for organizational scholars exploring age inequality. In particular, we suggest that the focus of future research should not just be on discriminatory practices that occur between individuals or ageist practices, but also how particular ageing ideologies constitute the wider organizational systems and structures in which individuals are located.

However, since vampires have entered the public imagination, there have always been defences against them, and defenders. It is perhaps ironic that previous vampiric narratives, analogies and analyses (Block, 1996; London and Rubenstein, 1994 Parker, 2005) miss the vital dynamic role of the mortal hero – the aged vampire hunter Professor Van Helsing, the

fearless and resourceful Mina Harker, or the anti-hero of Renfield. This article began by suggesting that the enduring popularity of the character of Count Dracula is not only his innate 'vampiric' qualities, but also on the dynamic created between Dracula and the ageing heroes that pursue him. We might therefore ask if age inequality at work can be similarly challenged or reconfigured through departing from the idea of heroes and villains in social scripts surrounding age discrimination and instead focussing on the dynamics that are produced through a search for immortality versus a realisation of death. A possible research direction might be found in rethinking how both practitioners and scholars themselves conceptualize ageing within an organizational arena. The limited vocabularies and language we have to conceptualize and categorize age, work and organization often suffer from multiple conflations between biological, material and the social. When viewed through a vampiric lens, however, ageing can be reframed as a negotiation and tension manifested against an undefined but inevitable end. The demonic and the heroic are formed through the various ways in which this negotiation and tension is played out. As we have argued, the vampire and the vampiric seems to offer one possible means through which an understanding of the 'older worker' problematic might be more usefully understood.

The fallible and fragile positions as represented in the mortal characters of Stoker's novel allow us to challenge the ideology of immortality perpetuated and shared by popular representations of both vampirism and of organization. As we have argued, the presence of the vampiric as an organizing function is also particularly harmful as it has a tendency to shorten the life course of *all* organizational workers. For example, contemporary categories of 'youth' may not take into account the new dynamics of growing up in terms of graduating students beginning their chosen careers much later in life. Similarly, 'prime workers' are expected to uphold unrelenting notions of productivity and advancement, whilst the narrative

of the 'useful' older worker suggests that only a limited few can be considered as valuable commodities, even though the age of retirement increases. As such, we forget at our peril that the life course of the mortal organizational subject is shortened at both ends by a vampiric discourse of immortality and regeneration that feeds upon the body of the worker whilst continually redefining what might count as a 'productive' working life. It is perhaps through an acknowledgement of this insatiable vampiric hunger for fresh blood and the exploitation of the 'human-as-resource' that we might reclaim the mortal characters from Stoker's novel, not through an individualizing discourse of heroic (and ageing) vampire hunters, but as a reminder of the importance of maturity, fallibility, and mortality as an essential quality of organizational life and death.

Conclusion

A vampiric lens for the study of age inequality presents a timely reflection on the current older worker 'problematic' by exploring how organizational dynamics surrounding (un)dying, regeneration and neophilia may contribute to the systematic marginalisation of workers – older and younger – in the current workplace. In addressing the absence of research examining organizational age inequality, this article has considered the possibility of older worker inequality as a product of monstrous organizing itself, rather than occurring within or independent of neutral organizational discourses and material spaces and practices. This argument has a number of consequences for how we think about and study workplace age inequality and ageing in organizational life more generally. First, our analysis demonstrates the need to develop thoughtful frameworks to interrogate all aspects of workplace ageing. Whether considering the behaviours or practices associated with inequality, or exploring the various subject positions and identities that influence how age is experienced in and around organizational settings, it is vital to consider the organizational

level as being more than a neutral mediator or catalyst. Secondly, if age inequality inadvertently occurs as the consequence of general organizational dynamics, it is not enough to suggest that ageism will disappear indirectly through an osmotic process of legislation, diversity training, or an increased number of older people in the labour market. This does not confront the possibility that organization may involve and even require certain monstrous desires to categorize, exploit, marginalize and ultimately use up those resources that sustain it. Exploring possible ways of challenging this position through context-specific analyses and an acknowledgement of the monstrous and the vampiric is therefore required for the critical study of work and organization.

Our position then is to call for an agenda which understands ageing as a mutually constituting principle of organizational life. Drawing attention to the monstrous aspects of organization is by no means the only way to interrogate ageing as an organizational dynamic: inevitably it highlights certain phenomenon and by consequence marginalizes other issues. In particular, considering its literary roots, it may be that our vampiric lens in particular risks normalizing the dominant masculinity of contemporary organizations that has been critiqued in previous studies of organizational life[5]. However, the vampiric lens not only highlights the pervasiveness of anti-ageing narratives that may marginalize those who are viewed as older workers, but also the impossibility of those aspirational measures inscribed by organizational logics which expect all individuals to be fresh, flexible and unrelenting in their ability to produce for the organization, even in the face work intensification, job insecurity and constant change. In short, we forget at our peril that the life course of the mortal organizational subject is shortened by the vampiric discourse of immortality and regeneration that feeds upon both the old *and* young. To this extent, whilst Duncan and Loretto (2004) rightly observe that women are 'never the right age' at work, we would suggest that the

impossibility of embodying the ageless, nubile subject produced through vampiric discourses means that no individual can ever fully be 'the right age' in contemporary forms of organizing.

In conclusion, the deeply entrenched ideals of (im)mortality, regeneration and newness present a significant challenge in negotiating a successful career trajectory whilst being located within the system that reproduces such discourses by its very nature. This is made more difficult where individuals become complicit in its production, or have fewer spaces within which to challenge these views due to the strength of cultural values surrounding youth and old age. Sievers (1994: 13) suggests that 'a culture which places its main emphasis on youth and early adulthood must make it even more difficult for its individual members to question the predominant ideology of immortality'. While our vampiric lens may have limitations in terms of exploring only one way that age manifests in organizations, it turns attention away from the 'older worker' as a discrete and individualized subject and instead frames ageism as an organizational fear of mortality. Such a fear may fester deep within the nature of the contemporary workplace, causing an aversion to ageing and subsequent abjection of the older worker despite the best intentions of policy and management practice. In making explicit our collective reliance on the monstrous to constitute organizational life– in both academic research and everyday practice – we open up new spaces for analysis and discussion concerning the relationship between mortality and organization. Moreover, offering a novel monstrous vocabulary provides a means through which one can reveal subtle processes of age inequality. Such processes can be seen as just one of the many ways the vampiric organization gains its seductive power over those it seeks to manage. In so doing, our analytical lens has sought to denaturalize and so super-naturalize this vampiric tendency

of organizational life and to begin questioning whether it is possible to reconcile the desire for organizational immortality with the ageing and mortal individual at work.

Notes

1. We deliberately bracket off the term '(im)mortality' throughout the article to indicate the inherent tension that lies in the desire for - and impossibility of -transcending death. As we argue, the vampire as a monstrous other gains its symbolic power by existing at this impossible intersection and in so doing makes explicit an irresistible tension that often defines contemporary organizational life.

2. The Count of Stoker's novel is partly based on the myths and folklore of nosferatu as plague carrier, but also the historical figure of *Dracul*, better known as Romanian warrior king Vlad Tepes (the Impaler) who protected his boarders from Turkish invaders by impaling his prisoners of war on huge wooden stakes (McNally and Florescu, 1975). However, later characteristics of the Count as urbane aristocrat where inspired by Polidori's short story *The Vampyre* (1819) – a tale itself based on the ghost story told to John Polidori and Mary and Percy Shelley by Lord Byron during their infamous stay at Villa Diodoti, Lake Geneva in the summer of 1816 (see Hindle, 2003a; 2003b).

3. For example, the deadly effects of sunlight were only introduced when Dracula was brought to cinema screens in the early 20th century. This is in contrast to Stoker's Count Dracula who merely becomes mortal and vulnerable during daylight hours. More recent cinematic representations have also played with the function of sunlight

in vampire mythology with heroes manufacturing technological ultra-violet weaponry to battle the undead, or the vampires of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series whose skin merely sparkles when it comes into contact with sunlight.

4. This is perhaps why Stoker's *Count Dracula* only seeks to convert attractive young women rather than the male protagonists of the novel. There is certainly no possibility that he might seek to transform the ageing Van Helsing, and it is perhaps these youth obsessed and libidinal qualities that explicitly connect the organizational with the vampiric.

5. We thank the anonymous reviewers of this article for pointing out the obvious implications that a vampiric lens might have for the further study of gender, age, and organization. Indeed, it is worth noting that although contemporary versions of the *Dracula* story often involve masculine heroics between the Count and Van Helsing, in the novel it is the female characters of Lucy and Mina that arguably provide the more significant moments of heroism. We will leave the reader to ponder whether such notions of masculine heroics also unnecessarily dominate contemporary representations and narratives of organizational life.

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