Queering lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender identities in human resource development and management education contexts

Introduction

This article engages with queer theory and the practice of queering with the aim of enabling researchers within the fields of human resource development (HRD) and management education (ME) to conceptualise lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) identities as performative and unbounded, with potentially subversive effects. One reason for focusing on HRD is that, with some notable exceptions (McDonald, 2013, 2015), it is one of few areas within the management learning domain that has engaged with queer theory (Chapman and Gedro, 2009; Collins, 2010; Gedro, 2010; Gedro and Mizzi, 2014), primarily to challenge the hetero/cisnormative bias that has been noted in HRD research and practice (Bierema; 2015; Collins, 2012; Schmidt and Githens, 2010). This emergent literature offers valuable insights into the potential of a theory that has yet to impact profoundly the wider discipline of management and organisation studies (Pullen et al., 2016). Further scope exists for advancing queer theory deeper into the realm of HRD, connecting with scholars and practitioners interested in mobilising identities as a foundation for HRD. Although this article takes HRD as its primary context and aims to reach out to scholars within this domain, it seeks also to converse with academics within management learning and education more broadly, especially those who are intrigued by the notion of 'queer pedagogy' and interested in queering identities, organisations and modes of organising.

The import of LGBT or any other identities as a cornerstone for understanding management learning, education and for examining HRD more broadly is still in a state of infancy (Black et al., 2017). Yet identity has such potential as can be seen in the increasing recognition that training and development for many contemporary occupations and job roles is a project of the self (Fenwick, 2004). Indeed, individuals are increasingly bearing the responsibility and costs of their own skill development and employability, underlining the importance of shaping organisationally desirable and viable identities and subjectivities. Articulating the salience of the link between HRD and identity, HRD scholar and self-identified 'gay man', Joshua C. Collins writes 'my vision for HRD involves comprehensive

practice that does not exclude any person based on some aspect of their personal identity'
(2012: 350). Yet, as Collins (2012) and others note (Chapman and Gedro, 2009; Gedro,
2010), the heterosexual/homosexual identity binary persists within HRD and ME research
and practice, constraining the expression and performance of alternative – queerer -
embodiments of sexuality and gender. Within the current cultural matrix of identity binaries
(e.g. male/female, masculine/feminine), this article poses a question around which the
ensuing discussion is structured: how can scholars mobilise queer theory concepts to move
beyond treating LGBT identities as binaried, bounded and stable categories within HRD and
ME contexts? Exploring the possibilities that arise from this question, this article provides a
review of queer theory to help scholars engage more deeply with some of its key concepts
and theoretical resources. In so doing, it is hoped that queer theory can be used as another
available conceptual resource to examine LGBT identities *queerly*: as performatively
constituted and permanently open to discursive contestation and resignification.

This discursive frame is extended to the domain of HRD which is understood as a set
of historically patterned, shifting discursive arrangements that are enmeshed within power
relations (Anderson, 2010; Sambrook, 2001). Adopting this discursive approach paves the
way for recognising that HRD is an effect of discourse. This allows for a nuanced
understanding of the genealogy of HRD which, as analyses show, has been and continues to
be shaped at the roiling intersection of competing discourses relating to management,
training, development and education (Anderson, 2010; Sambrook, 2001). Despite its
variegated constituency and the difficulties that surround defining it, there is a consensus
among HRD scholars that the 'dominant discourse in the field [of HRD] has a performative
lean embracing the corporate model of enhancing performance to satisfy shareholders'
(Bierema and D'Abundo, 2004: 444). Critical research has emerged over the last decade or so
which problematises the performance orientation of dominant HRD discourses (Bierema,
2015; Fenwick, 2004), providing alternative discourses on HRD that seek 'greater justice,
fairness and equity in how HRD is theorized and practised' (Gold and Bratton, 2014: 402).
These counter hegemonic discourses on HRD, often tagged as 'critical human resource
development' (CHRD), have circulated criticism regarding the impoverished history within
the domain of HRD of recognising and addressing LGBT workplace issues generally
(McFadden, 2015), and LGBT identities in particular (Collins, 2012).

For example, Bierema (2015: 122) notes that the 'dominant heteronormativity of
management scholarship has made research on LBGT, particularly transgendered people,
practically absent from the literature'. Other researchers have bemoaned this lacuna in

scholarly knowledge (McFadden, 2015) as well as the inadequate coverage of LGBT issues within HRD curricula (Chapman and Gedro, 2009; Gedro, 2010), suggesting that dominant discourses of HRD are complicit in contributing to the ongoing exclusion and marginalisation of LGBT people. To illustrate, Schmidt and Githens (2010) discuss the resistance they encountered organising a pre-conference symposium on LGBT issues in HRD at the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) international research conference. One reviewer questioned the importance of their proposal for a LGBT pre-conference symposium while another wondered if this was an issue the AHRD wanted to 'promote'. Although the proposal was accepted, the AHRD 'strongly encouraged [Schmidt and Githens] to expand the session's focus to cover a broad range of workforce diversity topics and not focus on LGBT issues' (2010: 60). This outcome is disconcerting as the AHRD 'prides itself on being at the forefront of HRD research and practice' (2010: 60). Examples like this remind us that if such knowledge gaps are not addressed, the silence and marginalisation of LGBT sexualities and genders within HRD research and practice remains unchallenged. Under these circumstances, HRD scholars and practitioners will not acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to incorporate the lived complexity of LGBT identities into (re)shaping the foundations of HRD and recalibrating the capacity of ME to enable alternative (non-normative) subject positions, identities and subjectivities (Lawless et al., 2012).

With the above in mind, this article's contribution is twofold. First, it advances a growing body of CHRD scholarship on LGBT identities (Collins, 2012; Collins et al., 2015; Gedro, 2007; Gedro and Mizzi, 2014; McFadden, 2015), and an offshoot of this literature that has mobilised queer theory (Chapman and Gedro, 2009; Gedro, 2010; Gedro and Mizzi, 2014). The article demonstrates how queer theory can expand and develop the scope and ambition of this research to combat hetero/cisnormativity and incorporate LGBT identities into HRD and ME contexts, by drawing more deeply on queer theory concepts derived from Butler's writing on performativity and cultural intelligibility (1990a, 1990b, 1993, 1996, 1999, 2004). Second, the article shows how the practice of queering LGBT identities in a HRD context can be used as a conduit by management education and learning scholars for queering pedagogies, non-LGBT identities, organisations and modes of organising.

This article is structured as follows. The first section introduces queer theory and queering, both of which form the conceptual framework that undergirds the analysis of LGBT identities. Next, the article situates the project of queering LGBT identities in the extant HRD literature on LGBT workplace issues and a tributary of this scholarship which has mobilised queer theory. The third section of the article introduces and applies a range of ideas

from Butler's writing on performativity and cultural intelligibility to help move scholars toward queering LGBT identities in HRD research and practice. The closing sections of the article examine the wider implications of queering LGBT identities and deploying queer theory concepts, in particular in the context of ME.

Queer, queer theory and queering

The term queer has been understood in different ways including a term of insult for LGBT subjects, something that is odd, a position, an umbrella identity under which LGBT identities may be subsumed and as a theory (Sullivan, 2003). Since its debut on the academic conference scene in the early 1990s, queer theory has been largely appropriated by humanities and cultural studies scholars, and more recently by social scientists. Although queer theory has been spun along different theoretical trajectories (Hall and Jagose, 2012), it has typically been deployed for reading signs of queerness: the narratives, identities, relationships, images, discourses and texts that can be read as 'queer' – as something at odds with cultural and social regimes of normativity (see Doty, 1993; Edelman, 2004; Halperin, 1995; Sedgwick, 1990; Warner, 1993). Advancing this view, Halperin writes, 'Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*' (1995: 62, emphasis in original). In this way, Case (1991: 3) argues that queer theory 'works not at the site of gender [and sexuality], but at the site of ontology, to shift the ground of being itself'. Queer theory problematises humanist ontologies that essentialise sexuality and gender within binaries such as heterosexual/homosexual, male/female, and masculine/feminine. As Doty explains, queer theory seeks to 'challenge and break apart conventional categories' (1993: xv). From these insights, a sense emerges of how queer theory enables us to examine how ontologies operate as 'normative injunctions', setting the 'prescriptive requirements' whereby, for instance, bodies are constituted as culturally ineligible in terms of sex, gender and desire (Butler, 1999: 148).

For example, heteronormativity often figures centrally in queer theory research as an analytical category for understanding how heterosexuality is ascribed a 'normal' and 'natural' status, predicated on a set of assumptions that there are only two sexual categories - heterosexuality/homosexuality (Berlant and Warner, 1998). Queer theory exposes the 'operations of heteronormativity in order to work the hetero/homosexual to the point of critical collapse' (Angelides, 2001: 168). Likewise, queer theory has been proposed as a

valuable intervention for problematizing cisnormativity (Halberstam, 1998, 2005), a normative regime that has perturbing effects on subjects who identify as gender diverse (e.g. transgender, genderqueer, male-to-female, female-to-male, drag queens/kings). Established in the work of Bauer et al. (2009: 356), cisnormativity 'describes the expectation that all people are cissexual, that those assigned male at birth always grow up to be men and those assigned female at birth always grow up to be women. This assumption is so pervasive that it otherwise has not yet been named'. Considering these two examples, queer theory is less concerned with offering a system of ideas for explaining normative regimes, and more focused on working to 'undermine norms, challenge normativity and interrupt the processes of normalisation' (Wiegman and Wilson, 2015: 4). In this regard, queer theory is usefully approached not by interrogating what it is but by what can it *do*.

In that sense, this article engages with queer theory as a mode of critique, in particular the practice of queering. Although queering can be mobilised in different ways (Sullivan, 2003), it is usually operationalised as a practice of reading that goes against the grain of heteronormative and cisnormative culture, in order to seek out new ways of becoming (e.g. in terms of identity, subjectivity, relating). Queering aims to expose existing power relations that sustain normative regimes and to envision and experiment with alternative non-normative arrangements of power and knowledge (Seidman, 1997). For Parker (2016: 73), the practice of queering is 'more important' and has a potentially longer life span than queer. Queering is a 'practice which must always refuse the common sense of the day' and so if queering ceases, 'then thinking stops too' (2016: 40). Whether queering can be divorced from queer is a moot point, the full discussion of which is outside the scope of this article, but the significance Parker (2016) attaches to queering is germane to this article. Queering is pivotal in the process of problematizing and challenging a humanist ontology of identity predicated on absolute essences and polar opposites, and for queering LGBT identities. Before pursuing this, it is necessary to provide an overview of how queer theory and queering have impinged on the field of organisation studies more widely, and HRD and ME in particular.

Queer theory meets HRD

As Halperin (2003) laments, queer theory might have lost its capacity 'to startle, to surprise' within the disciplines (e.g. the arts and humanities) in which it has become normalised. However, queer theory is a long way off becoming a mainstay of management and organisation studies. Parker (2016: 72) rightly points out that 'the majority of business school

academics are not charmed by queer…and they never have been'. Explaining the apparent distaste for queer theory, scholars have pointed to the hetero/cisnormativity of business and management schools (Rumens, 2016), the legacy of separating sexuality and organisation and the 'relatively few students of organisation who are openly queer, or out as lesbian, gay, transgender or bisexual' (Pullen, 2016: 2). Despite this, a growing number of scholars are galvanising queer theory to pursue various goals: problematising organisational heteronormativity (McDonald, 2016; Rumens, 2012); rupturing LGBT identity categories (King, 2016); disrupting the concept of management in its various normative hues (Bendl et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2008; Parker, 2002, Tyler and Cohen, 2008); and, likewise, leadership (Harding et al., 2011; Muhr et al., 2016). Queer theory has also touched the sphere of management learning, exemplified by McDonald's (2013, 2015) development of 'queer reflexivity' as a lens for engaging in a 'reflexive questioning of the categories we use to identify people and recognizing the shifting nature of researcher and participant identities over the course of the research process' (2013: 127). In HRD and ME, the mobilisation of queer theory has been largely due to the sustained efforts of a small band of scholars committed to the following ends: queering the HRD curriculum and ME (Chapman and Gedro, 2009; Gedro, 2010); theorising LGBT identities and leadership queerly (Collins, 2012); and using queer theory to foster LGBT-inclusive models of HRD research and practice (Gedro, 2010; Gedro and Mizzi, 2014).

For example, Chapman and Gedro (2009) advocate queering the HRD curriculum, which they elaborate as an 'act of breaking apart predictable associations of sexuality and its representations' (2009: 97). They suggest how queering the HRD curriculum might entail, for example, creating safe places for LGBT issues to be heard, generating content and knowledge on LGBT issues in order to problematise current HRD epistemologies that imply knowledge is value-free and that standpoints can be neutral and objective. Such recommendations have wider implications for ME, particularly as LGBT identities and workplace issues seldom figure prominently in management curricula more generally (Giddings and Pringle, 2011; McQuarrie 1998). Queering the management curriculum can puncture the silence surrounding LGBT identities, bringing them to the fore in classroom discussions, module teaching materials and in critical analyses of hetero/cisnormativity, with the goal of helping students understand that binary categories are not inevitable, but normative constructions constituted through available discourses and norms (Butler, 1990a). Gedro's (2010) engagement with queer theory ploughs a similar furrow, citing queer theory as a conceptual resource that 'questions the instrumentalist epistemology of HRD' as well as nourishing

possibilities for alternative 'insights into ways to facilitate individual and organizational learning because it questions relations of power, privilege, and identity' (2010: 355).

More recently, Gedro and Mizzi (2014) proselytise their ideas on queer theory, and currently offer the most considered case for adopting queer theory within the field of HRD, alongside feminist theories. They reason that queer theory can act as a catalyst for change, not just by exposing harmful instances of heteronormativity within HRD research and practice, but also the 'spaces where categories are at play in an organization and where they reify classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, or any other 'ism' that is inevitably limiting'(2014: 454). The authors draw on Judith Butler's notion of performativity, albeit briefly, to underscore its potential as a 'radical critique of category-generating terms that manage identity' (2014: 451). This article seeks to realise the potential of Butler's writing on performativity in more detail, connecting it with other Butlerian concepts such as 'cultural intelligibility'.

In summary, the turn toward queer theory across organisation studies, HRD and ME has produced some exciting scholarly activity of the type that Parker (2016: 73) refers to as 'unsettling complacencies, for making something strange and hence forcing thought'. While dominant HRD and ME discourses may resist opening up spaces for scholars to mobilise queer theory to help LGBT identities flourish in the workplace, CHRD discourses have more than most fostered opportunities for researchers to explore these possibilities in HRD and ME. The next three sections of this article provide insights into some of the queer theory concepts that might be used to this end.

Judith Butler and performativity

The notion of performativity, as noted by Gond et al. (2015: 1), has resonated throughout philosophy, gender/sexuality studies and sociology, providing a rich theoretical backcloth for scholars to apply the concept within organisation and management theory (Learmonth et al., 2016; Schaefer and Wickert, 2016; Cabantous et al., 2015; Riach et al., 2014, 2016; Spicer et al., 2009). There are different permutations of the performativity concept, as Gond et al. (2015) point out, some of which diverge in meaning. For example, Spicer et al. (2009) argue that fostering a 'critical performativity' constitutes an important way in which researchers might cultivate 'openness and curiosity about the social world' (2009: 549), establishing an 'affirmative', 'engaged' and pragmatic approach' to critical management studies that might positively influence management practices. Elsewhere, Feldman (2000) deploys

performativity as the expression of routines such as recruitment and selection within the workplace. Relevant to this article is Judith Butler's writing on performativity (1990a, 1990b, 1993, 1996, 1999, 2004) as constituting the gendered and sexual self through the ongoing citation of norms.

Butler's theory of performativity is variously influenced by the work of Derrida, Foucault, Althusser, Lacan and J.L. Austin's theory of speech acts. The performativity of gender is premised on Butler's assertion that gender is 'the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (1990a: 43). Understood as such, the subject is not born or socialised into gender; rather, the subject must perform gender within pre-existing sets of discourses that condition the constitution of gendered identities, bodies and subjectivities. Crucially, performativity 'cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject' (1993: 95, emphasis in original). Butler urges us to understand that the repetition of gender norms is not inevitable or uniform but can vary, as the terms of 'gender designation are…never settled once and for all but are constantly in the process of being remade' (2004: 10). In that regard, performativity is not reducible to the notion of performance because the latter presupposes the existence of a performer or subject while performativity contests the notion of a preformed subject. Thus gender is performative because it is the *effect* of a regularised repetition of norms that may both enable and constrain how lives can be lived.

Butler's theory of performativity can underwrite the project of queering LGBT identities, helping HRD academics to address two fundamental questions that Cabantous et al. (2015: 8) ask when engaging with Butler's writing: 'Who are you? What are the conditions of the possibility of your becoming?' The question of becoming is, as the authors point out, an ontological one that, in part, demands we interrogate the discourses that constitute the 'grid of intelligibility within which organizational subject positions become available' (2015: 8). Riach et al. (2014, 2016) is a valuable illustration of this in regard to LGBT subjects and the use of Butler as a conceptual resource.

In a methodological account of their study of the employment experiences of older LGBT subjects, Riach et al. (2016) distinguish between 'organisational undoing' and 'reflexive undoing'. The former concept is used to refer to the organisational processes that 'fix' and stabilise human differences, identities, subjectivities and the categories and binaries

through and within which they are organised. As Riach et al. (2016) assert, viable organisational subjectivity is contingent upon the capacity for LGBT subjects to sustain a performatively credible conformity to the normative constructions of LGBT identity categories and binaries. Analysing this, Riach et al. (2016) deploy another concept, 'undoing reflexivity', to bring this complexity in how the subject is formed to the fore. Their study reveals instances of how LGBT subjects are engaged in the performativity that underpins the 'labour required to produce and maintain semblances of subjective coherence in and through organizations' (2016: 3-4).

For example, elaborated in Riach et al. (2014), one study participant called Debbie (a male-to-female transsexual) described the costs of violating organisational cisnormativity, in her case, as a result of her own process of transition. Debbie's transition, and her awareness of it as a 'violation', meant that she anticipated her work performance would have to alter. Employed in a traditional accounting firm, Debbie articulated the terms of accruing viability as an organisational subject when she said she expected to surrender the masculine 'older statesman' identity she had held as a man. Post transition, Debbie felt she would lose this 'edge at work' through being unable to utilise age-related archetypes of older men as powerful organisational figures in her style of negotiation at work. Riach et al. (2014) reveal how Debbie planned, post-transition, to exchange her masculine organisational status and age-related prestige for the ontological security she anticipated deriving from living as a 'woman'. Notably, Debbie seemed prepared to embrace age-related archetypes of what she described as 'just a middle-aged woman' who is socially and organisationally invisible.

In this example, Riach et al. (2014) demonstrate how the performative enactment of gender norms may constitute transpeople like Debbie as un/intelligible organisational subjects, which incur personal and professional costs. Living a transgender identity can detrimentally alter not only an individual's career aspirations and trajectory, but also their material circumstances. Debbie's case can serve as an important illustration for HRD scholars because it reveals the desire felt and experienced by some LGBT subjects for gender reinvention and resignification. Furthermore, it highlights how altering gender performances can reinforce a cisnormative gender binary. One of Debbie's motives for transitioning is experiencing ontological security promised by her remodified corporeal capacity to claim the identity category of 'woman' and perform normative femininity, even though there is no certainty that others around her will identify Debbie as such post transition.

Identity, recognition and cultural intelligibility

Following on from the above, HRD scholars have yet to consider fully how performances of identity are driven by a desire for recognition of oneself as, in Butler's terms, 'culturally intelligible' or as a 'viable subject'. Butler's idea of cultural intelligibility is tied to her observation regarding the constraints norms place on the recognition afforded to some subjects, but crucially not others, who are (in)capable of living a 'livable' life (Butler, 1990a, 2004). Through the citation of norms that (hetero)normatively align sex, gender and desire, the subject becomes 'viable' and thus qualifies for life within what Butler phrases as the 'domain of cultural intelligibility' (1993: 2). Becoming culturally (un)intelligible can involve 'normative violence', a term that denotes how 'the subject produces its coherence at the cost of its own complexity' (1993: 115). In other words, the incoherencies that arise when sex, gender and desire misalign, and which might form the bedrock for a livable life, are flattened out in becoming a coherent and thus viable subject within a hetero/cisnormative grid of intelligibility. Understanding the role of performativity within the domain of cultural intelligibility can inspire HRD scholars to explore what 'tacit cruelties' (1993: 115) are incurred when subjects sustain identity coherence to elicit recognition as viable organisational subjects.

Illustrating this, queer theorists have argued that 'butch lesbian' identities which are performatively constituted by 'female masculinity' are often found threatening and read as culturally unintelligible and undesirable (Halberstam, 1998), particularly when they are identified in opposition to normatively feminine heterosexual identities. In work contexts where heteronormative feminine norms hold sway, butch lesbian identities can be constructed as undesirable and at odds with dominant organisational gender norms. Woodruffe-Burton and Bairstow (2013) examine how the performance of butch lesbian identities in work contexts such as the selection interview can generate identity dilemmas. Some of their study participants voiced anxieties about whether to conform to heteronormative ideals of femininity by eschewing more masculine interview attire (e.g. trousers, shirts) in favour of what one lesbian described as 'wearing girlie girl clothes' (2013: 366). For some butch lesbians, wearing conventionally feminine attire was seen to enhance their chances of being identified and selected as a desirable and culturally intelligible organisational subject, thereby reinforcing the organisational norms that narrowly govern gendered cultural intelligibility within the workplace. Other lesbians in the study rejected this way of fashioning the self, given the level of discomfort associated with wearing clothing of this kind.

Considering the illustration above, Butler's cultural intelligibility concept yields insights into the potential differences in the capacity of LGBT subjects to sustain a performatively credible conformity to hetero/cisnormative binaried constructions of LGBT identity categories within the workplace. Crucially, attaining cultural intelligibility as a viable organisational subject, worthy of employment, may be actively sought after or resisted, and impossible to accomplish and sustain for others. Or, in the words of Butler, within the constraints of hetero/cisnormative intelligibility some identities will be 'impossible, illegible, unreal and illegitimate' (1999: viii). Butler's well-made observation is poignant, as it demands scholars and practitioners consider carefully the precarity and sheer multiplicity of LGBT identities as a foundation of HRD and ME theory and practice.

Destabilising LGBT identity categories

Translating the idea of LGBT identities as performative into practice, queer theorists advocate *destabilising* identity categories, exposing them as fictional creations that have artificial boundaries (Edelman, 2004; Warner, 1993). This may be understood as a *deconstructive* practice. Indeed, deriving from the work of Jacques Derrida (1967/1978), the notion of deconstruction can be traced in Butler's writing on performativity in how it is constituted as a critical response to humanist ontologies that posit identities as absolute essences and polar opposites. The influence of Derrida's writing on queer theory is far reaching in that regard. Deconstructive analysis is a practice that does not involve reversing the hierarchical positioning of identities within a binary; rather, it seeks to destabilise the humanist beliefs that consolidate identity binaries. To this end, the deconstructive practice of destabilising identity categories has been adopted by some queer theorists to the extreme lengths of rendering identity categories obsolete (Fuss, 1991). Elsewhere, Sullivan argues that deconstruction does not have to be deployed to 'annihilate' identity, but it can be used to 'highlight the inherent instability' of identity categories and binaries (2003: 51).

With Sullivan's (2003) perspective on deconstruction in mind, this section shows how destabilising LGBT identities is a valuable analytical practice. Importantly, it fosters critical awareness about the pitfalls of falling back into thinking that people who belong to specific identity categories automatically share certain things in common. Applying this, scholars and practitioners in HRD and ME contexts might critically reflect on facilely treating LGBT as a catch-all term that reifies sexual and gender difference. This is an important point given the groundswell of scholarly opinion within CHRD that HRD should act as an ally to LGBT

employees (Brooks and Edwards, 2009; Collins, 2012; Gedro and Mizzi, 2014). In an ally role, HRD scholars and practitioners would need to consider how the LGBT acronym can inadvertently fix LGBT identities because assumptions sometimes surface about the 'authenticity' of LGBT identity categories, such as when they bind people together through common experiences such as shared oppression (Gamson, 1995; Richardson and Monro, 2012). While one of the goals of queer theory is to destabilise fixed identities, the prevalence and reliance on mobilising LGBT identities as relatively fixed and stable categories for organising politically poses a quandary in HRD and ME contexts. This may be expressed thus: is it possible to generate inclusive and more equitable forms of HRD and ME research and practice targeted at LGBT subjects, without concretising LGBT identity categories? Alternatively, using Butler (1996: 371) to sound a cautionary note, 'identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression'.

Fathoming a way forward, some feminist scholars have appropriated Spivak's (1988) notion of 'strategic essentialism' which calls for the deployment of an essence of, say, gender identity to make unifying claims about the category of women and female subjectivity, while also questioning whether it is an essence at all. Strategic essentialism might be a useful tool for HRD scholars but, as Butler (1990b) avers, this kind of operational essentialism is problematic as it fails to account for the politics involved in 'who gets to make the designation [of gay man, lesbian, bisexual, trans] and in the name of whom' (1990b: 325). Despite this reservation, Butler is not against using identity categories. Elsewhere, Butler writes about her decision to appear at 'political occasions under the sign of lesbian' but only if is 'permanently unclear what precisely that sign signifies' (1996: 371). Put differently, we might insist, like Butler, that the invocation of identity categories such as 'lesbian' are on the condition they are understood as an open, multiple, heterogeneous and unstable term that includes its own instabilities. Still, there is always the risk that the subject is recolonised by the identity they claim, in ways not of their choosing.

Significantly, Butler does not read the deconstruction of LGBT identities as the 'deconstruction of politics':

> If identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism, and the politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects, a new configuration of politics would surely emerge. (1999: 189)

Striking about the quote above is that Butler makes no promises about the outcomes of the deconstruction of identity categories. It might/not precipitate an alternative queerer identity politics, which is not to undermine the utility of deconstruction as an analytical and political practice. Rather, in a Butlerian vein, deconstruction is a practice that is locationally contingent. It recognises the current pervasiveness of categorising identities and organising them hierarchically within binaries, while attempting to transcend such constraints in an open-ended and experimental rather than prescriptive fashion. Indeed, there may be opportunities to tap into the generative potential of the constraints that produce culturally intelligible genders and sexualities, but also condition the possibility for unintelligible formations of gender and sexuality (Butler, 2004). HRD scholars might research the existence of unintelligible LGBT identities, nurturing them in ways that might lead to their articulation within 'discourses that establish intelligible cultural life' (Butler, 1999: 190), confounding the distinction between (un)intelligibility and gender and sexual binaries.

In summary, the queer concepts outlined and illustrated above have clear implications for thinking through how LGBT identities can be organised as a foundation for HRD research and practice. At the same time, queer concepts such as performativity, cultural intelligibility and the practice of queering have implications that fan out beyond the domain of HRD. It is to these broader implications and other scholarly fields this article now turns.

Discussion: implications for HRD and ME

The practice of queering adopted in this article has important implications for HRD theory and practice, but they extend into the related field of ME. The following discussion considers more broadly the importance of queering identities, organisations and modes of organising for management learning scholars within HRD and ME.

HRD theory and practice

In terms of HRD theory, one implication of reconceptualising LGBT identities performatively is that it might help to accelerate the advancement of CHRD scholarship that has mobilised queer theory (e.g., Chapman and Gedro, 2009; Collins, 2012; Collins et al., 2015). The ongoing project of problematizing and challenging heteronormative and cisnormative bias in HRD theory is urgent, especially as HRD scholars acknowledge the

plight of minority groups as an important cause that has often been overlooked within the field (Collins, 2012; Schmidt and Githens, 2010). As shown above, Butler's notion of performativity underlines how gender and sexual norms have everything to do with how and in what way LGBT subjects can identify in terms of gender and sexuality in and outside organisations (Riach et al., 2014). Linked to the concept of cultural intelligibility, Butler's theory of gender and sexual performativity can enable HRD scholars to theorise the *differential* allocation of recognisability within and among LGBT identities. Theorising the circumstances under which some LGBT identities but not others are recognisable as viable, as intelligible, is one instance of how queer theory concepts can facilitate the interrogation of how power relations validate certain types of identity. This is vital work that can help generate new insights into the precarity of LGBT identities, which at present is an under-researched trajectory in HRD theory and practice (Black et al., 2017; Collins, 2012).

In that regard, this article also presents queering as a practice that can help HRD scholars to queer other identities. For example, queering heterosexual identities is an undeveloped line of inquiry within management and organisation studies generally; yet the association of heterosexuality with heteronormativity is frequently negative, insomuch as heterosexuality is criticised as an implicit standard of normalisation (Butler, 2004). However, heterosexuality and heteronormativity are not inextricably hidebound to each other, not least because manifestations of heterosexuality vary enormously, some of which might be understood outside the limits of heteronormativity (Berlant and Warner, 1998). For example, within queer academic literature emerges the figure of the 'queer heterosexual' or the 'queer straight', described by Schlichter as 'lovers both of "the opposite gender" and of queer discourse' (2004: 543). Queer heterosexuals have constructed themselves as potentially transgressive queer subjects (see Thomas, 2000). Although this has sparked controversy, the potential for heterosexuality to be aligned with 'queer' underscores the capacity of some heterosexuals to dismantle their own normative status. Queer heterosexuals may well be important additions to the band of critical scholars who are seeking non-normative, more equitable and fairer ways of doing HRD in organisations.

Another implication of queer theory for HRD research and practice is that it underlines how HRD discourses can change and be changed. Scholars might tap into queer theory's impulse to question and alter the status quo, strengthening the identity of HRD as an ally to LGBT employees (Brooks and Edwards, 2009; Collins, 2012; Gedro and Mizzi, 2014). Again, Butler's theory of performativity is an invaluable tool, as Cabantous et al. (2015: 8) contend; specifically, it enables scholars to examine the conditions of possibility for

becoming a viable subject, after which we can 'start attempting change, which will require intervention to change discourses'. Cabantous et al. (2015) illustrate this possibility for changing discourses in an analysis of the film *Pride* (2014), which dramatized the infamous UK coal miner's strike during the 1980s. In particular, *Pride* hones in on a point in history when discourses of homophobia were rife and condoned by the British government, yet a 'Lesbians and Gays support the miners' group' was formed to raise funds for a Welsh mining community. As Cabantous et al. (2015: 206) suggest, *Pride* provides insights into how social, cultural and political change can condition the possibility for new discourses to emerge, ones in which 'a new language becomes available through which performatively constituted [LGBT] identities are no longer abjected but proud'. This throws up all manner of possibilities for HRD scholars and practitioners to change HRD discourses that set the terms by which organisational subjects who identify as LGBT or otherwise constitute themselves as viable subjects in the workplace. One possibility for changing discourse is within the contexts in which ME is enacted and delivered.

Management education

The implications of a Butlerian theory of performativity resonate with HRD and management learning scholars and practitioners involved in management education. The possibility of performative power in ME contexts, particularly in regard to pedagogy, gives ME scholars and practitioners much to think about in terms of deploying practices that are motivated from queer propositions. For example, queering ME is potentially a powerful way to expose and erode pedagogical discourses that produce majoritised (e.g. heterosexual) and minoritised (e.g. LGBT) educational subjects (Pinar, 2012). Queering these discourses is a politically charged project and an imperative that is enacted through pedagogical practices that seek to disrupt the ways in which hetero/cisnormative discourses circulate within educational contexts. Or, as Britzman (1995: 155) expresses it, a 'queer pedagogy' can flag the 'study of limits, the study of ignorance, and the study of reading practices'. The notion of a queer pedagogy connects with but differs from the types of critical pedagogies already conceived and developed within critical management education which seek to challenge oppressive institutions and practices by focusing issues of power and domination (Fenwick, 2005; Sambrook, 2010). Critical pedagogies within ME have drawn widely from critical theories (e.g. Marxism, poststructuralism, feminism, critical race theory) but have yet to engage fully with queer theory which, unlike some critical pedagogies, turns its analytical gaze on the

norms that discursively constitute 'pedagogy' and 'pedagogical practice' (Britzman, 1995; Pinar, 2012).

For ME practitioners, forms of queer pedagogy can expose how they inadvertently 'read straight', to use Britzman (1995) words, whereby the heteronormativity of reading practices consigns limits on what can be known within the classroom. The practice of queering ME might entail searching out texts to read queerly, as Tyler and Cohen (2008) demonstrate. It might also involve locating texts that are specifically and unapologetically written from a queer perspective. These practices of rereading can play a vital role in addressing ignorance about LGBT identities and what new knowledge is needed. As Shlasko (2005) maintains, 'we can anticipate that new knowledge or information may pose a problem for students and ask how this knowledge will challenge students' preconceptions about the topic, or about themselves, and what they will need to reconsider or even unlearn in order to learn it'. As such, ME scholars might reflect on their own pedagogical practices and performativites within educational contexts and ask: What are the current limits imposed by pedagogical discourses on how LGBT identities are understood within ME?; What are the effects of current pedagogical practices based on heteronormative and cisnormative assumptions? How can I act as an ally for LGBT students? Significantly, queer pedagogical practices can help to destabilise all manner of organisational identities.

For example, queer pedagogical practice can clear a space for educational subjects to talk differently about work, job roles and organisational life that challenge the widely accepted ontologies of organisation. It can scythe straight to the heart of normative regimes that discursively construct and regulate educational subjects as 'managers' in particular ways. Acknowledging this, the practice of queering has wider implications for ME as a site for management learning. It might facilitate teaching methodologies and methods that instigate a deconstructive or 'reflexive undoing' (Riach et al., 2016) whereby educational subjects are able to articulate the normative performances of identity required of them (e.g. by organisations), in order to sustain a sense of themselves as viable organisational subjects. As Tyler and Cohen (2008) have shown, drawing inspiration from Butler's writing, the desire for recognition (e.g. as a manager) underpins the organisational performance and management of gender norms within a heteronormative grid of intelligibility. Such texts might be used to inspire subjects to reflect on, even 'undo' (Butler, 2004) their own performances of the norms that accord them recognition as managers. Channelling queer theory's anti-normative energy, ME practitioners might encourage such 'undoings' and reflections to facilitate insights into how becoming manager can be reconstituted in ways deemed unintelligible, that transcend

dominant managerialist discourses on organising (Parker, 2002). Indeed, Butler's theory of performativity is a sharp tool for analysing how the performative reiterations of norms constitute the ontological effect that is the 'manager' but also the 'organisation'. As such, the management classroom might become a context for exploring the possibilities for the resignification of normative discourses and their punishing norms, for thinking more imaginatively about how organisation and organising can be undone and reconfigured otherwise.

Conclusion

This article has sought to contribute to the theorisation of HRD and ME research and practice through the lens of queer theory. The queering of LGBT identities categories has formed a central focal point of this article, which builds upon and extends the scope and ambition of CHRD research that has already initiated a dialogue with queer theory. Both LGBT identities and the field of HRD are key focal points in this article, but the implications of engaging with queer theory, in particular to mobilise the conceptual resources of Judith Butler, are far reaching.

Developing these implications further as potential avenues for future research in management learning, this article rounds off by suggesting that queer theory forces thought (Parker, 2016) on how, for example, discourses of queer theory and HRD might intermingle, breaking down unhelpful paradigmatic divisions between 'critical' and 'dominant' discourses of HRD. Important research is warranted on how queering can support projects of this kind, such as Sambrook and Willmott's (2014) endeavour to generate closer and more empathetic dialogues between HRD, ME and management learning. Queer theory has a capacity, as yet largely untapped and under-researched within management learning, to dismantle unhelpful forms of academic enclosure. Potentially, management learning scholars have an array of options available to them for contesting and transgressing the current normative constraints within their field.

Employed to a different end, this article encourages researchers to explore what identities can form the basis for re-shaping management learning in non-normative ways. We need not limit our discussion to LGBT identities, as indicated above. Eng et al. (2005) advocate using queer theory to examine how processes of identity normalisation may be understood simultaneously from multiple points of view shaped by differing axes of human difference such as race, ethnicity, age, class and disability. In this way queer theory stands a

better chance of retaining its political valence as a 'site of collective contestation' (Butler, 1993: 228), in order to resist being fully owned and limited to the interests of one group of people. This also means that the relationship between queer, queering and queer theory warrants ongoing critique. It might be that Spivak's (1988) notion of strategic essentialism enables us to deploy 'queer' to redraw the hetero-cisnormative contours of management learning contexts, but also to act as a rallying point for other 'queer' subjects (e.g., straight queers) to organise, so we might achieve an expanding range of political goals. In this capacity, queer can function as an important term that carries the pain and pleasure of becoming culturally unintelligible, but it might also be reworked to signify other meanings as yet unanticipated. Queering is a vital mode of reading and anti-normative critique that can facilitate this kind of scholarship, asking us to address difficult questions about what is at stake in term 'queer' when it is used as an identity, attitude, position, theory or something else. As such, queering has the capacity to extend the range of queer and, perhaps as Parker (2016) suggests, outlive the utility of queer as we currently understand it. In delivering on the promise queer theory holds for our discipline, this article hopes more HRD and ME scholars turn to queer theory to think what has not yet been thought so we preserve queer theory's capacity to make the familiar strange.

Notes

1 The LGBT acronym is deployed throughout this article with care, not least because such acronyms are prone to smoothing over and essentialising differences within and between L(esbian), G(ay), B(isexual) and T(ransgender). The main motive for using the LGBT acronym in this article is largely out of convenience, but also because it is likely to be familiar to a management learning readership, and thus forms a basis of understanding from which queering practices and propositions may be developed.

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