

## Towards Queering the Business School: A Research Agenda for Advancing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Perspectives and Issues

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This article draws on queer theory to advance a research agenda that foregrounds lesbian, gay, bi and trans (LGBT) perspectives and issues as one means by which business schools can be made queer(er) institutions to work. As such, this article employs a process of queering to expose how LGBT people experience and negotiate the heteronormativity within business schools. A queering approach is encouraged to generate research on LGBT sexualities that can reveal instances of queerness within business schools, with the aim of helping LGBT people and their allies to foster alternative ways of relating, identifying and organizing that transcend heteronormativity. As such, the research agenda elaborates on the importance of the following: problematizing organizational heteronormativity; queering organizational and management knowledge; and the role of straight and queer allies. This article concludes by speculating about the implications of a queer(er) business school for LGBT people and their allies.

Keywords: queer theory, LGBT people, heteronormativity, business schools, queer activism, straight allies

### Introduction

I think it's great you're open about your sexuality, but are you taken seriously as a gay man in the business school? (anonymous student feedback)

The comment above was scribbled on one student feedback questionnaire, returned after I had given the final lecture of an undergraduate diversity management module I was teaching at a former university. When I first read this student's remark I did not know whether to laugh, cry or tender my resignation. It raised uncomfortable questions about how my sexuality might discredit me in a business school: did it make me less of an academic? Did it undermine my credibility as an ex-human resources practitioner who knows something about putting management theory into practice? What did my students really think of me as a gay man in a business school — a token diversity signifier, as someone out of place, or something Other? The comment drew my attention also to the fact I had been teaching sexual orientation on a diversity management module that had offered up a managerial account of the workplace issues affecting lesbian, gay, bi and trans<sup>1</sup> (LGBT) people. I wondered if any LGBT students on the module might have been disgruntled with this safe version of sexual orientation in the workplace, angered by its lack of ambition to imagine alternative inclusive conditions for sustaining LGBT perspectives, lives and identities that resist managerialist and heteronormative models of assimilation. That such comments fed back to me as a module leader, as part of a business school process of evaluating standards of 'good' teaching, speaks also to me about the careful evaluation on the part of LGBT teachers when faced with an ongoing live dilemma of whether or not to come out as LGBT in the management classroom. Responses to these questions and issues have been gestating inside me throughout my career as a teacher and researcher in a number of business schools, despite the paucity of published

research on the experiences of LGBT people employed within business schools to guide my thinking. Although I am unsure of some of the answers to such questions (of course there can be no definitive answers), my purpose in this article to inspire others to join me in thinking through the potential of using LGBT people's perspectives to disrupt the heteronormativity of business schools.

In light of the above and positioned as a research note, this article draws on queer theory to advance a research agenda that foregrounds LGBT perspectives and issues as one means by which business schools can be made queer(er) institutions to work. There are important reasons why the perspectives and issues relating to LGBT people are worth examining. One reason concerns the heteronormative bias that pervades the organization studies literature on business schools. The near absence of LGBT issues and voices in this scholarship reproduces a heterosexual/homosexual binary that posits heterosexuality as a normative standard by which other sexualities are judged and found wanting (Warner, 1999). As Berlant and Warner (1998, p. 548) assert, heteronormativity maintains damaging binaries within 'institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality not only coherent — that is, organized as a sexuality — but also privileged'. Assumptions of heterosexuality as natural and privileged obscure the fact that LGBT people are an important constituency of many institutions such as business schools, and a group of people who can find themselves skewered by organizational norms, values and practices of knowledge coded in heteronormativity (Bowring and Brewis, 2009; Rumens and Broomfield, 2014; Ward and Winstanley, 2003).

As such, another reason for investigating LGBT people's issues and experiences in the context of the business school is linked to the queer theory perspective which frames this article; namely, that the voices of LGBT people are recognized as being important for enriching future research that problematizes the heteronormativity of these institutions (Fotaki, 2011). Some studies have acted as a corrective (Giddings and Pringle, 2011; McQuarrie, 1998; Ozturk and Rumens, 2014), but they are few in number. Addressing this lacuna in the literature is crucial if we are to expose business schools as heteronormative, but also move beyond a general, if not compelling, argument that these institutions are heteronormative because almost everywhere is. While heteronormativity is pervasive within numerous societies across the globe (Colgan and Rumens, 2014), it is neither uniform nor universal in the form it takes and how it affects individuals. There are likely to be important differences in how LGBT people experience heteronormativity in business schools, differences that are sometimes ironed out in the LGBT acronym. At the same time, we must avoid treating all business schools as the same, for it ignores potential variation in how these institutions are organized, managed and the type of management education and research they offer and generate. Such variation is likely to influence how heteronormativity is manifest and the opportunities that might be occasioned for contesting it.

Another reason for singling out business schools concerns the role and purpose they are seen to play within society. From one viewpoint, the business school may be used as a generic term to designate a range of institutions across the globe where management is taught (Rowlinson and Hassard, 2011), but the tenor of debate about the purpose of these institutions

has often been critical. Starkey and Tempest (2005) sum up the main criticisms that have reprimanded business schools as: (1) being little more than a trade school with a flimsy academic reputation; (2) too market driven, with the effect of dumbing down academic knowledge; and (3) failing the very people it is supposed to benefit — i.e., aspiring business leaders, senior managers and directors. Even within the strand of organizational scholarship which has been highly critical of the neoliberal model marketization of higher education within business schools (Grey, 2002; Parker, 2014; Starkey and Tempest, 2005), in particular how it has contributed to a deeper entrenchment of gender and sexual inequalities (Clark et al., 1999; Currie et al., 2000), LGBT people rarely figure as the subject of debate as business school students, academics and other members of staff. This neglect is disturbing because LGBT people are likely to constitute a significant population within numerous business schools, with many LGBT persons, myself included, having vested interests in reshaping the environment and the purpose of business school twofold: (1) making business schools safe(r) places for LGBT people to work and learn; and (2) cultivating business schools as institutions for incubating budding managers and leaders who can dismantle organizational heteronormativity which, as research shows, routinely harms LGBT employees in terms of job loss, stunted career development, reduced self-esteem and limited participation in organizational life (Colgan and Rumens, 2014).

In this vein, one criticism that is more pertinent for the queer theory perspective which threads this article is that business schools are so ‘atheoretical’ they ‘fail to educate’ (Ford et al., 2010, p. 71), particularly on issues of social justice, equality and diversity (Kelan, 2013). Poor engagement with theories in other disciplines such as the humanities, social sciences and the arts, of which queer theory is a prime example, is one reason why business schools are considered theoretically impoverished by some academics (Ford et al., 2010), especially for generating knowledge and research on LGBT workplace issues that rupture heteronormativity (Creed, 2005). Nonetheless, a growing number of scholars have attempted to make the study of management more ‘critical’ by drawing on other disciplines when designing a curriculum that enables students to examine issues of inequality, power and control (Ford et al., 2010). This article connects to this body of work which forms part of a wider endeavour among some management scholars to cultivate more reflexive debates within business schools about the mechanisms of hierarchy and exclusion that operate within them.

As such, queer theory is presented in this article as one example of a conceptual resource that is not the standard fare of business school teaching and research which might be used by scholars to bring to the fore the perspectives and issues of LGBT people. Such research and teaching when it is committed towards challenging heteronormativity serves as one possible means by which business schools might be made queer(er) places to work. In so doing, this article contributes to an emergent organizational literature that speaks about ‘queering the academy’ by making an ‘academy of queers’ and ‘queering the idea of the academy’ (Parker, 2002, p. 162, emphasis in original). Indeed, my concern largely lies with the former, building on the sentiment voiced but underdeveloped by Parker that an academy of queers requires that ‘queers are brought in from the cold in terms of different living arrangements, pensions

schemes, anti-discrimination policies, and so on' (2002, p. 162). This research note intends to show how queer theory has a crucial role to play in queering the business school so LGBT people and their allies can play active roles in developing counter-hegemonic practices that widen the field of possibilities for living a life that is not stuck in the grid of heteronormative politics as we currently know it.

To begin, I review the research that sheds light on how business schools may be understood as heteronormative, delving into an organizational literature on the subject and a parallel literature on the experiences of LGBT academics and students in higher education. Next I discuss how queer theory provides the conceptual frame for a research agenda that aims to make business schools queer(er) places by using the following research trajectories to foreground the issues and experiences of LGBT people: (1) queering organizational heteronormativity; (2) queering organizational and management knowledge; and (3) queer allies. This article concludes by speculating about the implications of a queer(er) business school for LGBT people and their allies.

### Business schools as heteronormative: LGBT issues and perspectives

Conceptually, this article takes as its baseline the idea that organizations are important but often unacknowledged sites wherein heterosexuality is reproduced as privileged and 'natural' and, thus, established as normative (Hearn et al., 1989). This may be through policies that favour heterosexual family arrangements, cultural norms that construct LGBTsexualities as the Other and personal interactions that stigmatize LGBT sexualities (Hearn and Parkin, 1987; Humphrey, 1999; Priola et al., 2014). Over three decades of organizational research on LGBT sexualities shows how LGBT employees variously engage in an on-going process of negotiating heteronormativity at work (Colgan and Rumens, 2014), confronted as they are by varying forms of employment discrimination and persecution that have led to harmful outcomes such as job loss, low self-esteem, physical and emotional injury (Giuffre et al., 2008; Humphrey, 1999; Law et al., 2011; Ward and Winstanley, 2003). This research reveals how LGBT employees negotiate disclosure of their sexuality iteratively (Ward and Winstanley, 2005), adopting specific strategies to manage their sexual identity at work in order to avoid negative repercussions or to integrate openly into organizational life (Clair et al., 2005; Woods and Lucas, 1993). Such issues resonate deeply with LGBT people employed in higher education generally (Pugh, 1998; Rofes, 2000; Talburt, 2000; Tierney, 1997; Wallace, 2002), and are illustrated starkly in the Equality Challenge Unit report which investigated the experiences of 720 LGBTstaff in 134 UK higher education institutions (Valentine et al., 2009). The report found evidence of 'systematic institutional discrimination and implicit discrimination in relation to promotions, discretionary pay rises and redundancies', with LGBT staff having been routinely exposed to 'negative treatment' from 'colleagues (33.8%), students (18.9%), and those who work in other areas of their HEI [higher education institutions] (25.3%)' (2009, p. 2).

With some important exceptions (Giddings and Pringle, 2011; McQuarrie, 1998; Ozturk and Rumens, 2014), little is known about the concrete experiences of LGBT people within business schools. From a small trickle of studies it is evident that heteronormativity within

business schools can manifest in different ways, with potentially different outcomes for LGBT people. For example, McQuarrie (1998) analyses the experiences of gay and lesbian academics and LGBT issues in management education given that sexual orientation is often missing in management course content, even in diversity management teaching. McQuarrie (1998) exposes the prevalence of homophobia in the management classroom which codes gay and lesbian sexualities as the 'Other', rendering discussion of gay and lesbian topics difficult but, crucially, as McQuarrie maintains, integral to management education. Nonetheless, for some academics, instigating discussions of LGBT sexualities as a vital component of management education is a dilemma: it is an opportunity to educate managers on LGBT issues and perspectives, but also an occasion for negative reprisals if, for example, such debates initiate unplanned identity disclosures in the classroom. Significantly, research on LGBT people employed in higher education published over a decade later paints a similarly bleak picture.

Giddings and Pringle's (2011) first-hand account of their experiences as lesbian academics in a university business school in New Zealand reveals the challenges they face negotiating identity disclosure at work, acting upon their commitments to disclose to students (in light of one female lesbian student claiming she had only heard the term 'lesbian' uttered twice throughout her business degree course) and decisions to embody a lesbian identity in the workplace using clothing. Regarding work dress as a component of expressing a lesbian identity, Pringle writes: 'Some lesbian women may feel comfortable with the masculine forms of dress implicit in a "professional" code. Within a business school where masculine dress is the norm ... get a navy jacket, it's an essential item for the upwardly mobile academic, lesbian or not'. One implication of this is that a 'successful' female business school academic is discursively fashioned in a way that subordinates personal preferences about how to embody a 'lesbian' identity at work. Of course, heterosexual women may find a 'navy jacket' equally uncomfortable or undesirable work attire, but for some female academics this may constrain valuable opportunities for using clothing to identify as, or be comfortable inhabiting, a lesbian subject position in the workplace (Skidmore, 1999). Furthermore, we glimpse here the normative pressure brought to bear on subjects to 'fit in', which for LGBT people might also involve altering behaviour and values in ways that align with heteronormativity in order to achieve visibility as 'out' academics.

In that regard, research on gay men in UK business schools shows how building and sustaining viable selves and identities as openly gay men within heteronormative discourses can lead to the creation of a gay/queer binary. Viable, visible gay identities within business school contexts were those which adhered to heterosexual norms, occasioning discursive opportunities for gay men to identify as 'normal' in terms of respectability and conformity, with queer positioned as its Other. Indeed, one gay male academic in Ozturk and Rumens (2014) puts it thus:

It's dangerous to come out as queer ... business students will conjure up all manner of things in their heads about being sexually promiscuous, a rainbow flag waving political nutter ... someone who is out to cause trouble. I consciously veer away from that persona (Edgar, senior academic)

Intriguing then about this study is that by mobilizing discourses of heteronormativity, some gay men reproduce a cultural logic of exclusion through the placement of gay and queer within a hierarchical binary that subordinates the latter. In this binary, queer is narrowly understood as only ever being disruptive, over-sexualized, radical and even destructive and, as such, must be contained or managed out altogether. These study findings chime in with other organizational research that has shown how embracing normative heterosexual values is the only way for some gay men and lesbians to construct a 'normal' sense of self (i.e., so they are 'just like' heterosexuals) within heteronormative work contexts (Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009; Williams et al., 2009). Indeed, examining the consequences for LGBT people negotiating heteronormativity within higher education institutions in the UK and the US, Morrish and O'Mara (2011, p. 987) conclude that many institutions 'prefer the invisibility of queers, lest they bring universities and colleges into disrepute'.

Equally disturbing is the paucity of research on LGBT students' experiences of life within the business school. This is a problem because studies show that campus life can be hazardous for students who identify openly as LGBT. For example, in a UK study of campus climate towards LGBT students, Ellis (2009) found that despite the increased implementation of an equality agenda (e.g., equal access; widening participation) in UK higher education, homophobia on campus is still a serious and widespread problem. Many UK universities were neither perceived nor experienced by LGBT students as 'safe spaces' in which to be open about sexual orientation/gender identities. Crucially, in some educational contexts there may be significant differences in how certain sexual and gender identities are understood and thus subject to overt forms of discrimination. For example, Beemyn (2005) laments how transgender students in the US frequently face some of the most virulent forms of discrimination because they are positioned as subjects who transgress hierarchical gender and sexual binaries (e.g., masculine/feminine; heterosexual/homosexual) by which gender and sexuality are understood in restrictive dualistic modes of thinking. Areas of campus life where transgender students experience discrimination because of gender-exclusive policies and practices include health care, residence halls, bathrooms, locker rooms, public inclusion and training. Such studies convey a troubling account of higher education from a LGBT student perspective, especially as higher education is a crucial context for forming and developing sexual and gender identities (Ellis, 2009), and students within business schools are no exception.

Responses to these problems are varied and patchy. For example, in the UK, some universities have set up LGBT support groups and introduced diversity policies inclusive of LGBT people, among other things, to achieve accreditation as a 'Diversity Champion' in the Workforce Equality Index (Stonewall, 2014). This publication, pitched as a reliable 'annual guide to Britain's most gay-friendly employers', is produced by Stonewall, a leading LGBT rights charity organization. At present 73 universities appear on the 'Diversity Champions' programme as members 'committed to working with Stonewall to improve their workplaces for their lesbian, gay and bisexual staff' (Stonewall, 2014). However, only five appeared as champions in the 2014 index. Notably, detail is not provided in the Equality Index about how different faculties and departments such as business schools within each university might

vary in their engagement with LGBT people and issues. As such, it is unwise to prejudge what 'gay-friendly' badges (e.g., a 'diversity champion') signify at ground level insofar as LGBT students and staff members' daily lives are concerned.

Still, many LGBT people in their roles as academics and students have organized politically on campus in ways that move from striving for LGBT representation on campus, to questioning the very normative processes that permit possibilities for representing some LGBT sexualities but not others. For instance, Renn's (2007) US study of LGBT student leaders and queer activists demonstrates how some students adopted a queer activist identity, of which an important part was participating in campus protests, marches in Washington, DC, and local political action campaigns. For these students, being 'queer' implied an obligation to take action and a heightened awareness of what might be at stake, as one student remarked: 'I asked myself if I was willing to risk my life for activism, in order to make things easier for LGBT people ... and I decided yes, that I was ... That just really increased my involvement, when I became dedicated to becoming an activist' (Renn, 2007, p. 324). Indeed, queer forms of activism continue to persist, such as those fostered in the work of ANSO ('Association of Nordic and Pol-Balt Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Student Organizations') which aims to combat 'discrimination based on homophobia and transphobia in universities and aims to increase the quality of higher education by fighting heteronormativity' (<http://ansoblog.wordpress.com/about/>).

In sum, the potential of queer theory to stimulate research and activism that problematizes and dismantles heteronormativity in higher education prompts Renn (2010, p. 137) to argue for queer theory as a 'key to opening doors to theoretical advances across higher education research'. Indeed, this observation accords with the aims of this article stated above. I turn now to elaborate the conceptual muscle located in queer theory to exercise a research agenda to that effect.

### Queer theory and queering

Nurtured within the humanities over two decades ago (de Lauretis, 1991), queer theory has taken on various shades and meanings as it has traversed different academic disciplines and been pressed into service for cultivating theoretical analyses of such things as popular culture, literature, politics and terrorism as well as instigating forms of queer activism (Bersani, 1995; Halberstam, 2011; Halperin, 1995, 2012; Puar, 2007; Sedgwick, 1990; Warner, 1993). Genealogical analyses of queer theory are especially revealing in that regard, and also of the contorted and contested nature of its historical lineage in feminism, gay and lesbian studies, poststructuralism and postmodernism (Sullivan, 2003; Turner, 2000). Despite variations in how it is understood and used, much queer theorizing is motivated by a concern with the heteronormativity of everyday life, in particular the constraints and possibilities it variously conditions for subjects to build meaningful identities and selves within and beyond sexual and gender binaries. As such, queer theory can be understood as a conceptual resource for exposing the unstable and multivalent nature of identity, language and norms.

At the same time, the 'queer' in queer theory has often been understood as a noun to refer to a group of people who identify as 'queer', which has typically denoted those who identify as LGBT.<sup>2</sup> However, for the purposes of this article, it is the use of queer as a verb to indicate a process of 'queering' that is most apposite. Queering is a multifaceted process that has been variously understood as deconstructing identity categories that are congealed in binary formations (e.g., masculine/feminine, man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual), developing reading/writing practices that expose and problematize the means by which sexuality is textually constituted and as a form of critique that questions the idea of 'normal' behaviour (Sullivan, 2003). In the context of this article, queering is employed as an insatiable process of critique, akin to Parker's description of queering as an 'attitude of unceasing disruptiveness' (2002, p. 158), in which it continuously problematizes what is taken-for-granted and constructed as 'normal' (i.e. the heteronormative) within and outside business schools. This may necessitate deconstructing identity categories and binaries. Specifically, queering as a process of incessant critical questioning can expose and celebrate the instability and diversity of meanings attached to sexual binaries (e.g., heterosexual/homosexual) and identity categories such as masculine and feminine (Muhr and Sullivan, 2013). One intention then of queering business schools is to nurture rather than prescribe alternative ways of understanding LGBT issues and perspectives that might disrupt the heteronormativity of the business school.

This process of queering views sexuality like gender, as a category of knowledge that is historically conditioned and culturally contingent, rejecting essentialist accounts of sexuality as a fixed and 'natural' property of the individual. Following Butler (1990, 1993, 2004), sexuality and gender are understood as the performative effects of reiterative acts that can and are repeated within a heteronormative frame which over time 'produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler, 1990, p. 33). Put differently, through acts of repetition and recitation, sexuality like gender becomes ritualized, the effects of which make it appear 'natural'. As such, heterosexuality is hoisted above homosexuality within a hierarchical binary that positions the former as 'natural' and LGBT sexualities as Other. But queering is not simply a series of theoretical postures. Queering is understood here as a politics that has at its heart what Gamson calls 'an action logic' (1995, p. 396), in that it seeks to occasion possibilities for people to build and sustain lives beyond heteronormativity. Here, it is crucial to acknowledge that queer theory is better understood as something that is not the opposite of heteronormativity or what is 'heterosexual' but, rather, what is 'normal' and normative (Halperin, 1995; Warner, 1993, 1999). In this way, queer theory contains an expansive energy that sustains 'its weird ability to touch almost everything', well beyond LGBT people who have typically been the objects of its concern, as Love (2011, p. 182) points out. In light of this, I turn next to outline a queer theory research agenda that can pave the way forward for examining LGBT issues and perspectives within business schools.

#### Towards queering the business school: an LGBT-focused research agenda

This research note connects to a small and important body of emergent organizational literature that has mobilized queer theory to challenge what is taken-for-granted or 'naturalized' about organization. In this literature queer theory has been applied in the



analysis of ‘diversity management’ (Bendl et al., 2008, 2009), ‘leadership’ (Bowring, 2004; Harding et al., 2011; Muhr and Sullivan, 2013), ‘management’ (Parker, 2001, 2002; Tyler and Cohen, 2008) and ‘public administration’ (Lee et al., 2008), in order to destabilize normative constructions of these concepts and prise open opportunities for thinking about alternatives. Another segment of organizational research marshals queer theory as a potential resource for transcending dualistic conceptions of gender and sexuality (Linstead and Pullen, 2006, Rumens, 2013; Thanem, 2011), fostering forms of queer reflexivity in organizational research (McDonald, 2013). Another strand of scholarship has deployed queer theory to examine the habitual (re)production of heteronormativity in organization and its effects on LGBT employees (Lee et al., 2008; Rumens, 2012; Rumens and Broomfield, 2014; Tindall and Waters, 2012; Ward and Winstanley, 2003; Williams and Giuffre, 2011; Williams et al., 2009). Collectively, this queer theory inspired research is worth celebrating because much, although not all, of it has been produced by academics located within business schools. It bears testimony to the possibilities of being able to engage queer theory within these institutions, despite the barriers (Creed, 2005).

This article specifically connects and contributes to research that has used queer theory in debating business schools. Parker’s (2001, 2002) work is exceptional in that respect, and may be considered one of the first to articulate queer theory’s capacity to destabilize normative visions of management and the process of knowledge production in business schools. Deriving inspiration from Butler (1990) and Sedgwick (1990), Parker (2002) reasons that if management can be shown to be a social construction, historically patterned, it follows that we may wish to explore how we can ‘do’ management in ways that do not engender cruelty and inequality. One response to this predicament is what Parker calls ‘queering the idea of the academy’ (2002, p. 162, emphasis in original). Following Clough’s (1994, p. 167) similar assertion about feminism, it is suggested that queer theory can ‘disturb the idea that the forces of power are outside the academy and that therefore academic knowledge can offer a disinterested judgment of politics’. This might be a self-evident point to make about knowledge being value-free but, as Parker rightly avers, management knowledge has ‘often pretended to be so under the guise of scientism’ (2002, p. 162). The challenge of queer theory then is to undermine the epistemological foundations of the academy, creating, say, a continuous series of little earthquakes that rupture and destabilize rather than finding comfortable accommodation within university departments.

By articulating a research agenda outlined below, this article contributes further to the idea of queering the academy by considering what it is to make an ‘academy of queers’ (Parker, 2002, p. 162) that includes LGBT people and their allies. Part of this endeavour concerns placing LGBT perspectives and issues firmly on the table within business schools, but not in a way that provides a comfortable pretence that seeks to rob LGBT research of its potential to queer, or disrupt and rupture, heteronormativity. In the following sections, then, I propose a research agenda that may help organization studies scholars to use queer theory to generate scholarship to that end. The elements of the research agenda outlined below are linked as follows. First, I outline the need to address the heteronormativity of business schools and its impact on LGBT people which gives rise to further questions, addressed in the following

subsection, on the pedagogical implications of using queer theory in the management classroom. Such a task is no small matter and in the final part of this section I discuss how queer theory can move us to ask: Who else besides LGBT people might be involved in addressing LGBT issues and instigating forms of queer activism within the business school?

### Queering organizational heteronormativity

Given the shortage of research on the concrete experiences of LGBT people negotiating heteronormativity within business schools, research on this issue is a priority. Queer theory has a concern for creating work environments that are more inclusive of LGBT sexualities (Rottmann, 2006), but not on terms and conditions grounded in heteronormativity that endeavour to reaffirm divisions between what is 'normal' and what is 'abnormal' (Williams et al., 2009). LGBT sexualities may be incorporated into business schools smoothly, as something different yet tolerable, with little critical questioning about what constitutes 'tolerable difference'. Yet research has shown that the construction and organization of gay male sexualities within business school work contexts may be tolerated and even accepted, only when they align with and strengthen the dominance of heteronormativity (Ozturk and Rumens, 2014). As noted above, research that engages in queering is, in part, animated by a deconstructive impulse to expose heteronormativity as a structure of power relations in society and critique its normalizing and exclusionary effect on LGBT people (Stein and Plummer, 1994). As such, we need to know a lot more about the organizational realities of LGBT people within business schools so we can understand how heteronormativity operates strategically, before deciding how it might be ruptured.

For that reason, queering the business school relies on future scholarship structured by a number of research questions that directly focus on LGBT perspectives on heteronormativity. For example: What are the conditions of possibility that give rise to organizational heteronormativity within business schools and how can these conditions be destabilized? How do organizational discourses of heteronormativity construct LGBT sexualities and posit a 'model' or 'normal' LGBT academic/student? This last question gives rise to issues about the integration of some lesbian and gay men into specific organizational contexts and the homonormativity this may reproduce: the social, economic, political, classed and gendered privileges some gay and lesbian people now experience as they are subject to processes of normalization (e.g., gay marriage, civil partnerships, pension benefits), as noted by Duggan (2002). From a queer theory perspective, another pressing question for scholarly inquiry is how business schools might reproduce homonormativity, and what does this knowledge reveal about understandings of 'acceptance' within and between organizational sexualities?

In responding to this last question, it is important to note that LGBTsexualities do not operate on the same level of turf, so it is imperative to gain deeper insights into how heteronormativity informs notions of acceptance (and tolerance) within groups (e.g., gay men, bisexual men) and across groups (e.g., is there greater acceptance of lesbians in particular business school settings than bisexual men/women, than gay men, than transgendered people?). Through a queer theory lens, attention may be directed to the clumsiness of constituting acronyms such as LGBT inasmuch as they imply a shared single

identity among people who differ considerably in how they live their lives as gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans. Queer theory's general aversion to how people are categorized according to sexual and gender identities, especially when they are treated as fixed and essential, offers a critical perspective for examining how hierarchies of acceptance among LGBT sexualities are regulated (e.g., by gender norms) differently within business schools. Research of this kind is likely to be of huge importance for problematizing how some business schools manage LGBT diversity as part of wider university efforts to manage sexual orientation as a diversity brand (e.g., a Stonewall 'Diversity Champion') and a type of organizational pride. In summary, differences within and between sexual identities need very careful, sustained scholarly investigation, more so than is currently afforded.

### Queering organization and management knowledge

Like previous studies (Creed, 2005; Gibson-Graham, 1999; Parker, 2001, 2002), I advocate queering organization and management knowledge production within business schools, but by explicit engagement with LGBT issues and perspectives. Queering management knowledge is already under way within some business schools, exemplified by Fleischmann's (2009) reanalysis of F.W. Taylor's infamous and highly influential principles of scientific management. Elsewhere, Bendl et al. (2008, 2009) bring queer theory to the literature on diversity management to throw into sharp relief how diversity management discourse (re)produces heteronormativity through restrictive gender and sexual binaries. These examples indicate the potential of queer theory for unsettling heteronormative assumptions underpinning management, but queering of organization and management knowledge is needed that draws LGBT issues and perspectives into the force of its critique.

Lee et al. (2008, p. 149) are useful here because they suggest queering theory, whether that be related to management or even queer theory itself, which involves adopting diverse reading strategies and multiple interpretative stances so that regimes of the 'normal' can be undermined. Taking the management classroom as an example, such reading strategies and interpretive stances are sorely needed if academics are to refuse the 'heteronormative violence of course content that cannot hold queer lives', as Simpson (2012, p. 951) puts it. It is a travesty and a failing on the part of business schools if students are not exposed to LGBT issues and perspectives on the management curriculum. Queer theory organizational scholars need to be alert to this, not just for breaking a silence that enwraps LGBT sexualities as a topic of classroom conversation, but also how the management classroom might be used to recreate heteronormative conditions of acceptance upon which LGBT individuals are permitted to participate in organizational life. Specifically then there is research to be done on how teaching sexual orientation in the management classroom, particularly when it is couched in terms of diversity management, can marshal LGBT people into a 'gay-friendly closet' (Williams et al., 2009), whereby maintaining 'normal' gay and lesbian identities can result in a state of 'invisibility'. In this way, students who identify as LGBT and who aspire to management may find themselves in a bind: demonstrate similarity and play down differences with normative constructions of heterosexuality in order to fit in at work, or risk being cast out to the margins of organizational life if they choose to adopt queer(er) ways of identifying sexually. Queer theory allows us to get to the nub of the problem: a state of

visibility and the promise of integration into a dominant heterosexual mainstream, granted on the condition that LGBT employees avoid exposing how organizations are orientated around heterosexuality, around those who are already in place. Bendl et al.'s (2008) research on queering diversity management addresses this, but only up to a point that falls short of examining the implications for LGBT individuals who find themselves constituted as 'positive' signs of organizational diversity in management textbooks and business school diversity statements and initiatives.

Queering management knowledge requires business school scholars to be cognisant of how management knowledge is variously complicit in sustaining heteronormativity and how they, as teachers and researchers, might be (in)advertently implicated in its production. When used in the management classroom, queer theory research can help scholars to act as internal agitators, overcoming blocks to the discussion of heteronormativity. Furthermore, it can help scholars and students to jam up the machinery of the business school as a site of knowledge creation that might package LGBT people as signifiers of a 'positive', diverse organization. At the same time and as Creed (2005, p. 391) rightly points out, 'pragmatic concerns like publishing or perishing' will shape the ways the study of heteronormativity and LGBT sexualities will unfold in and outside the management classroom. Indeed, evidence of LGBT issues being labelled insubstantial research topics in academic disciplines and the negative career outcomes experienced by those who pursue such research interests (LaSala et al., 2008; Taylor and Raeburn, 1995) are stark reminders of the challenges faced by scholars who wish to study LGBT issues, let alone inflect their research with queer theory. I agree with Creed (2005, p. 392) who reasons that 'many business schools will not be amenable places for conducting research on heterosexism in organizations' and, I add, for using queer theory to that end, but that is no excuse for not doing it.

For those business school scholars who can, the following research questions are pertinent: What can LGBT academics expect when researching LGBT issues in business schools? What are the experiences of LGBT students within business schools? How is queer managed in the management classroom? Can queer forms of pedagogy be developed and introduced into the management classroom, and what are the consequences and outcomes for those involved in producing and exchanging knowledge about LGBT people?

### Queer allies

In setting out a research agenda that aims to queer the business school by examining LGBT issues and perspectives through a queer theory lens, it is vital to ask who might help in that endeavour. While it is obvious that many LGBT people within business schools have a sizeable stake in that project, not least to counter heteronormative discourses that squelch opportunities for doing organizational research on heteronormativity and its impact on LGBT sexualities, this should not mean we use 'queer' as code for LGBT people and issues. Queer theory is not a collection of theories forged by LGBT people exclusively for advancing LGBT issues and agendas (Sullivan, 2003). While queer theory has proved perennially popular for examining LGBT sexualities for very good reasons, mentioned above, the expansive remit of queer, as an irritant of what is 'normal' and 'normative' (Halperin, 1995),

means that others may seek to travel under a 'queer' banner. Research on 'straight allies' is revealing in that respect, exploring heterosexuals' advocacy for LGBT rights (Fingerhut, 2011). This is an important issue for business school scholars interested in using queer theory to advocate for LGBT rights and issues because the appropriation of queer theory among heterosexuals for problematizing heteronormativity is controversial (Thomas, 2009), not least due to arguments that heterosexuals have a great deal to lose if heteronormativity is weakened. Still, from a queer theory perspective, the relationship between heterosexuality and heteronormativity is complex, fluid and sometimes ambiguous. Returning to Berlant and Warner (1998), cited earlier, heteronormativity is not coherent, uniform, stable and always easily identifiable as a body of rules, ideas, beliefs and values. It stands to reason that not everything about heterosexuality is heteronormative, but understanding how that is manifest within business schools, and how heterosexuals can help those LGBT people with an interest in rupturing heteronormativity, is tantalizingly open to empirical investigation.

Mobilizing queer theory would allow business school scholars to develop insights into who might be involved in the process of queering business schools. Research could be directed as follows: Are there straight allies in business schools, and who are they and how can they engage in queering practices at work? What forms does student and academic queer activism take in specific organizational settings? How can straight allies act as organizational change agents within business schools, in order to challenge organizational heteronormativity and the workplace inequalities experienced by LGBT people? What influence do LGBT/queer student organizations have on the heteronormativity of university life, and how is this influence felt and experienced by staff and students within business schools?

## Conclusion

In this research note I have served up queer theory as an example of atypical fare within business schools that could whet the appetite of those researchers keen to bring to the fore the perspectives and issues of LGBT people. In so doing I am compelled by my experiences and those of others to sound a cautionary note about not underestimating the difficulty of pursuing such a research agenda. Business schools can be hostile places of work for LGBT academics and much progressive work needs to be undertaken in that respect. There appears to be a distinct refusal in some business schools to confront the issues facing LGBT individuals and to engage with the radical impulses of queer theory. However, having been imported into some business schools, queer theory has the potential to yield further mileage for those people who work within business schools to go beyond identifying the diversity of LGBT sexualities. It must concern itself with rupturing the heteronormativity of the business school, working against the grain of normativity to prise open alternative ways of organizing and educating. Three research trajectories have been proposed to those ends, but these are not to be regarded as exhaustive as the possibilities here are multiple. However, these avenues of future research share an affinity with other organizational research that makes a plea for developing scholarship that questions the heteronormativity of the business school (Fotaki, 2011; Giddings and Pringle, 2011; Ozturk and Rumens, 2014; Parker, 2002). Promoting queer theory organizational research on LGBT sexualities is one step towards cultivating business schools as queer(er) places to work, at least but not exclusively for the benefit of

LGBT people. Here, then, this article contributes to existing research on queering management and business schools (Parker, 2001, 2002), in particular Parker's proposal of developing an 'academy of queers'. Pursuing this, some but crucially not all LGBT people are likely to identify as queer alongside some 'queer heterosexuals' (Thomas, 2009), but an academy of queers should not exclude those heterosexuals and LGBT individuals who do not identify as queer. It might be that an academy of queers affords accommodation for LGBT and heterosexuals but at the same time conditions possibilities (rather than making comfortable room) for queerness to emerge that, for example, encourages all of us to break out of normalized, restrictive categories of sexuality and gender (Muhr and Sullivan, 2013). While it is important not to lose sight of queer theory's potential to direct attention to that labelled 'normal', and of alternatives to heteronormativity, it is unhelpful to imagine queer theory only as a radical and disruptive opposite to heterosexuality (Halperin, 1995) or, as Parker (2002) asserts, to management and the business school. To do so restricts the flexibility of queer theory to touch these phenomena in unpredictable ways, as a force of critique that trains our attention to aspects of sexuality, gender, management and business school life which is not culturally intelligible.

As such, LGBT issues and perspectives can throw into focus the contours of heteronormativity within specific contexts, and queer theory provides a framework of understanding how particular subjects and behaviours are rendered unintelligible when they cannot or choose not to fit a heteronormative binary gender and sexual order (Butler, 2004). This is because queer theory research on LGBT issues has more than most facilitated a piercing analysis of heteronormativity, especially as many LGBT people's lives have been, and continue to be, severely damaged and curtailed by heteronormative values and practices (Sullivan, 2003; Warner, 1999). In that regard, it alerts us to what an academy of queers ought not to look and feel like: as something gummed to the grid of heteronormative politics as we currently know it.

Another contribution this research notes makes is to escort business school scholars towards queer theory as a means of cultivating accounts of LGBT lives within and outside business schools that are uncensored by heteronormativity. Here heterosexuals stand to gain from a queer(er) business school inasmuch as heterosexuals experience pressure to conform to a heteronormative binary gender and sexual order. This gives rise to the idea that business schools could be places that help to enlarge the field of possibilities for living a heterosexual life beyond the confines of heteronormativity. Indeed, this research note has shown how queer theory can have a crucial role to play in conditioning the possibility for LGBT people and their allies within business schools to consider and play active roles in developing counterhegemonic discourses that destabilize heteronormativity within and beyond these institutions. So in one sense queering, as it is employed in this article, is about not only creating safer business schools for LGBT people to participate in, but also about exposing queerness where it exists as a way of nurturing conditions for alternative ways of relating, identifying, organizing as well as doing research and teaching that transcend heteronormativity.

In regard to teaching and research, exciting opportunities are occasioned within a queer(er) business school because the management classroom could function as a site of engagement and interest in Otherness, but not in ways that treat instances of Otherness such as LGBT sexualities as organizational resources. As I conceive it, a queer(er) business school is not an institution in which LGBT issues and perspectives find voice only when they are articulated through organizational concerns about enhancing performance, efficiency and diverse workforces. As some of the research questions above suggest, scholarship on how queer theory might develop queer forms of pedagogy is important for facilitating how management students can unlearn what they have learnt about heteronormativity, and how such knowledge could be used to challenge heteronormative forms of organizing in the workplace. Mobilized in this way, queer theory research has an impulse to action (Gamson, 1995) and is a form of politics that through a queer(er) business school can invest in building new futures that allow us to transcend the confines of heteronormativity. Of course this might work against the purpose of the business school as some kind of finishing school for managers grounded in managerialist values (Grey, 2002) but, as Parker (2002) reasons, the potency of queer theory lies precisely in its ability to touch things in unpredictable and sometimes playful ways that open up unforeseen perspectives and avenues. In effect, this might lead us to instances of queerness within business schools, both palatable and unpalatable, that extend beyond accounts of LGBT perspectives and issues to broader issues of how business schools may establish more inclusive conditions for sustaining myriad perspectives, lives and identities that resist different normative models of being human in the world of work.

#### Notes

1. I use the acronym 'LGBT' throughout this article, largely for convenience. However, it is important to note that the 'T' refers to the proliferation of identities such as transgender, transsexual, gender queer, etc.
2. The salience of 'queer' as an umbrella term to refer to LGBT-identified people is highly contested. For example, queer theory research and politics have been chastised for excluding bisexuals (Hemmings, 1995) and trans-identified people (Namaste, 2000).

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