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From Chess to Queergaming: 'Play'ing with and disrupting heteronormative assumptions in the performance of gender and sexual orientation

The conceptual framework presented in this paper draws on metaphors of 'Game' and 'Play' to illustrate how tacit and invisible heteronormative assumptions and gendered power dynamics pervade organizations. In this way it illuminates how such assumptions and restrictions impact and marginalize LGBTQ* people that do not conform to heteronormativity. Using metaphors of *Chess* and *MMORPG* (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games), the paper explores limits of prescriptive dualistic understandings of gender and sexual orientation, specifically from the perspective of lesbian women, as basis for disruption and to start opening space for LGBTQ* difference through queergaming.

We argue that the concepts presented are a useful vehicle to increase inclusivity within HRD research and examine its practices more critically. In doing so, the paper seeks to answer calls from within the field of critical human resource development (critical HRD) to diversify HRD scholarship by expanding and challenging prevalent notions of heteronormativity.

Keywords: LGBTQ*, diversity, queer game studies, gender performativity, critical HRD

Introduction and purpose

16 years ago, Bierema and Cseh (2003, 23) raised the existence of 'organizational "undiscussables" such as sexism, racism, patriarchy, and violence' that 'receive little attention in literature yet have considerable impact on organizational dynamics'. Since then authors have criticized the field of HRD research for its lack of promoting diversity and equity (Bierema and Cseh 2003; Bierema 2010b; Collins et al. 2015; McFadden 2015; Schmidt et al. 2012). Bierema (2009) in addition highlights HRD's increasing dominance of a performance paradigm, which privileges a masculine

rationality at work feeding into power hierarchies that (re)enforce a hegemonic position of men over women. Such gendered hegemonic power hierarchies in turn are underpinned by a heteronormative[1] backdrop in which heterosexual norms are enforced through practices and structures (Leap 2007) that are reproduced in workplaces every day (Gusmano 2008) impacting minority gender and sexual identities.

Privileging heterosexuality as the norm in organizations and society is mirrored in a lack of LGBT related research and examination in the field (Collins et al. 2015; McFadden 2015). Conducting a systematic literature review within the business, management, and broader social sciences disciplines, McFadden (2015) determined that from 263 articles concerned with LGBT issues and experiences in the workplace, a mere 7% were located within the literature of HRD (approximately 18 articles). Moreover, little of the literature examined dealt with gender and sexual identities that fall outside conventional binary labels (McFadden 2015) (bar exceptions such as Collins et al. (2015) or Davis (2009) perhaps). These include, for example, identities under the queer umbrella term, which refer to those who identify their sexual orientation outside the conventional, normative homosexual/ heterosexual dichotomy and those who identify as both man and woman or neither man nor woman. Therefore, whilst we can see the emergence of HRD research examining LGBT lives, these efforts are marginal and lack discussion that is critical of normative binaries and as such inclusive of non-normative, queer gender and sexual minorities (McFadden 2015).

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[1] Heteronormativity defined as ascribing 'heterosexuality a normative and privileged status by reinforcing a heterosexual/ homosexual binary' (Rumens 2010, 957). This heteronormativity in the following is understood as: 'The practices and institutions that legitimatize and privilege heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships as fundamental and 'natural' within society' (Gusmano 2010, 33)

The lack of research for and about LGBTQ*[2] employees is particularly problematic given HRD's key role in facilitating development and change for all stakeholders (Bierema 2009). Calls from a critical strand of HRD remain to challenge prevailing dominant practices of management (*that exclude LGBTQ**) with the aim to transform workplaces and HRD practices to foster justice, equity and fairness (Fenwick 2004), and to diversify HRD scholarship (Collins et al. 2015; Williams and Mavin 2014). In response the purpose of this paper is firstly to bring to the foreground tacit gendered, heteronormative assumptions pervading organizations that impact LGBTQ* lives and secondly to conceptually explore ways to open space to discuss LGBTQ* difference. To do so we look towards literature outside of HRD, to critical management studies and organizational studies, to inform our framework and discussion (Bierema 2009; Callahan 2013).

The paper first elaborates key concepts to establish the underlying framework, before setting out the context of literature drawn upon. The metaphor of 'Game' and specifically the game of *Chess* is adopted to illustrate gendered, heteronormative assumptions pervading organizations before examining ways to 'Play' with the 'Game', drawing on queergaming and using the metaphor of *MMORPG* (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games) to disrupt conventional, binary assumptions. Finally, we seek to point towards potential implications of 'Play' to consider for HRD practitioners to challenge inclusivity beyond heteronormative boundaries.

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[2] Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer identities that are not heterosexual and/or cisgender (people whose gender identity aligns with the binary sex that they were assigned at birth). The asterisk used draws on Halberstam (2018, 4) in the intent to 'open the term up to unfolding categories of being organized around but not confined to forms of gender variance', that is to include non-normative identities beyond binarized labels such as homosexual/heterosexual, woman/ man, female/ masculine.

Gender and sexuality within LGBTQ* studies

In order to move forward the critical understandings of gender and sexual orientation within HRD, this paper draws on a body of literature on LGBTQ* experiences within organization and management studies, particularly conceptualizations that draw on notions of queer theory and that challenge normative assumptions within organizational settings.

Sexuality has long been addressed by feminists in terms of compulsory heterosexuality (e.g. Butler 1990; Rich 1980) --that is, heterosexuality as normative default applied to all bodies and against which all other sexualities are measured. Within the existing landscape of organizational scholarship and despite its advances into challenging heteronormativity, a great body of work however still seems to highlight and problematize sexuality from a gendered perspective steeped in implicit heterosexual assumptions. Moreover, studies bringing to the foreground experiences by sexual minorities within workplaces predominantly harbour a managerial focus on aspects such as: highlighting discriminatory behaviour in organizations and management (e.g. Day and Schoenrade 2000; Hall 1989), workplace experiences (e.g. Croteau 1996; Driscoll, Kelley, and Fassinger 1996; Ward and Winstanley 2003) or as a part of equality and diversity agendas and legislation (e.g. Colgan et al. 2007; Colgan et al. 2009; Wright et al. 2006). While studies surrounding sexual minorities in the workplace expanded by including, for example, identity development models (Cass 1979), strategies to manage stigma (Goffman 1963) as well as for coming out in the workplace (Button 2004; Ward and Winstanley 2005), and lesbian representations in leadership (Gedro 2010a), similarly to research within HRD, such studies show little critical engagement concerning restrictive binary conceptions of gender and sexual identity.

More recently in critical organization and management studies we can see a shift towards research seeking such disruption, influenced by postmodernism and poststructuralism, in which studies emerged that aim to transcend heteronormative boundaries of gender and sexuality and challenge heteronormative understanding at work within organizations (e.g. Brewis and Linstead 2000; Brewis, Tyler, and Mills 2014; Colgan and Rumens 2015; Fotaki 2011; Ozturk and Rumens 2014). Building on such endeavours the paper draws on postmodern conceptualisations of gender and the disruptive drive of queer theory to frame its discussion.

Framework

The framework supporting the conceptualization of 'Game' and 'Play' metaphors in this paper is outlined in the following. It is based on key concepts around how gender is constructed and performed in society, which type of relationship we perceive as default and 'normal' in society and how different gender and sexual identities are measured within this construction.

Gender performativity

Central to the paper is Butler's understanding that sex and gender are produced within a binary framework that is conditioned by compulsory heterosexuality. Butler challenges the naturalisation of sex, gender, the body and (hetero)sexuality and explores how non-normative sexual practices question stable gender categories (Butler 1990). She highlights the role of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich 1980) and what she terms the 'heterosexual matrix'. Gender and sex are effects that come into being through discursive practices: 'gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes…gender is always a doing' (Butler 1990, 34). Gender is understood as a signification that a body sexed within the binary system assumes by taking on subject

positions that conform with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility (Butler 1990). That is for women and men to perform gender in ways that are recognizable as feminine/ masculine and female/ male respectively. In order to become recognized and valued as human beings we must become readable within these socially intelligible norms (Butler 2004) as heterosexual women or men.

As Butler (1995, 31) further amplifies, this performance involves the 'ritualized repetition of conventions' shaped and compelled by compulsory heterosexuality which is reproduced and reinforced through their very repetition and recitation within this heterosexual matrix. For example, clothing, appearance, and dress may function as key signifiers in determining and maintaining the gender binary as well as the binary distinction of homo/heterosexuality (Clarke and Turner 2007; Hawkes 1995; or Skidmore 1999). As Dean (2005, 94) notes 'the question of what a lesbian looks like has at times been used for judging who qualifies as a "real" lesbian and who does not'. For example, to become good lesbians, according to Crowder (2012), butch lesbians make a deliberate effort to eliminate any suggestion of femininity by doing masculinity through clothing, hairstyle and by developing bodily skills. Whilst, this is a very restricted and narrow sense to view embodiments of lesbian women, there is still reason to suggest that these assumptions endure and linger, considering for example the persistent use of normative binary identities of butch/ femme (Crowder 2012).

Whilst performance in line with intelligible conventions consolidates heterosexual dominance, there is opportunity that opens potential for subversion of prevailing gender norms through 'resignification', that is the repetition of signification in a new context (Butler 1993). Butler elaborates that the '" reality" of gender is also put into crisis' when usual cultural perceptions fail and 'one cannot with surety read the body that one sees' (Butler 1990, xxiv) and therefore position it within the gender

binary as woman or man. Thus, transformational subject positions may be adopted, which though not outside the gender binary, 'disturb it by offering a different and confusing reading' (Kelan 2010, 186). Such an understanding of performativity, formulated as a concept, allows for agency that lies in how repetition is carried out and thus opens up potential for future discursive possibilities (Butler 1990) by enacting multiplicities of femininities and masculinities through one body (Bowring 2004; Butler 1990, 2004; Linstead and Brewis 2004; Linstead and Pullen 2006).

A performance of multiplicity however only reproduces existing possibilities of gender behaviour and thus 'does not allow us to think forms of existence that radically diverge from what is currently available to us – forms that … are strictly inconceivable from our present perspective' (Tuhkanen 2009, 22). Nevertheless, we contend that the notion of multiplicities in transformational subject positions may offer a pathway into creating confusion and queer how bodies may be read and made sense of in a heteronormative system.

Heteronormativity and queer theory

We draw on Gusmano's (2010, 3) understanding of heteronormativity as 'the practices and institutions that legitimatize and privilege heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships as fundamental and 'natural' within society'. Such a dominant heterosexual privilege manifests in unequal power relationships between the non-heterosexual minority ('Other') and the heterosexual majority ('One') (de Beauvoir, 1953). Heteronormativity therefore encompasses power hierarchies that enforce heterosexual norms through practices and structures (Leap 2007) that are legitimated in society and reproduced every day in workplaces (Gusmano 2008). These include for example heteronormative conceptions of marriage, monogamy, procreation, and productivity. In turn heteronormativity becomes the underlying default against

which every body is measured but that ultimately silences non-conventional sexual minorities who identify or are perceived as outside the binary spectrum of female/ male, feminine/ masculine, woman/ man, heterosexual/ homosexual.

In order to challenge the default, queer theory offers insight into the potential displacement of heteronormativity and examines the ability to destabilize heteronormativity by destabilizing gender norms. Halperin (1995, 62) explains and gives a working definition for what is queer:

> '..."queer" does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant'.

Queer is thus a useful tool to interrogate the 'natural', presumably real alignment of sex, gender, and sexuality (as conceptualized through Butler's heterosexual matrix) and to call into question such regimes that govern organizational phenomena (see Rumens, de Souza, and Brewis 2018).

Queer as a label is oftentimes used as an umbrella term representing all non-heterosexual identities (McFadden 2015). This also includes homonormative (Duggan 2003) and transnormative sexual identities that fit within the power structures of the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990). Whilst such LGBT identities may be viewed as queer by opposing the heterosexual norm, they are also criticised to reinforce heteronormative conceptions like for example marriage, monogamy and binary, oppositional understandings of gender. Thus, homonormativity does not challenge dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and replicates them (Duggan 2003). To conjure an image of homonormativity (Duggan 2003), Williams, Giuffre, and Dellinger (2009) develop the metaphor of the *gay-friendly closet* to

describe how LGB[3] inclusion and visibility in the workplace is contingent upon meeting heteronormative and homonormative identity behaviour. As a result, the focus lies not on resistance to oppressive heterosexual discourse but instead to become socially accepted and integrated by assimilating into heteronormative mainstream (Duggan 2004; Halperin 2012).

We aim to use queer as a term referring to identities outside binary normative conceptions and to push beyond mere assimilation of difference into an otherwise unchanged system (Slagle 2007). To indicate this in the text we use the term LGBTQ*. The asterisk used draws on Halberstam (2018, 4) in the intent to 'open the term up to unfolding categories of being organized around but not confined to forms of gender variance'. By doing so we put the focus on non-normative identities beyond binarized labels such as homosexual/heterosexual, woman/ man, female/ masculine, including expressions of multiplicity. More specifically to keep within the limits of this paper, we will explore a potential to disrupt hetero- and homonormativity in context of challenging binaries for lesbian women at work through performances of multiple opposing subject positions. We elaborate this by drawing on the metaphor of games.

Games

After setting the conceptual scene for this paper, we need to first outline what we mean by games and what renders games important in the context of work. Salen and Zimmerman (2004, 80, our emphasis) define a game as, 'a system in which players engage in an '*artificial*' conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome'. This very typical definition highlights a system in which actions, scores and

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[3] Emphasis by Williams, Giuffre, and Dellinger (2009) which does not include any identities outside of binary conceptions.

rules are interconnected. Players interact with one another in order to achieve a score, level or winning state, that defines a clear outcome of who has won and who has lost, what is fair and what is not fair, or evil and good within the confines of the game environment. The notion of artificiality, a constructed system with imposed binary rules (win/lose), may draw parallels with our understanding of heteronormativity and Butler's (1990) heterosexual matrix.

This becomes important in regard to the ways organizations foster environments driven by a win/lose mentality. We argue that such an environment harbours binary gendered value. In this paper we propose a conceptual way ahead to challenge a win/ lose dichotomy by drawing on notions of queer game studies that offer a frame to open potential spaces for multiplicities and queer possibilities (Ruberg and Shaw 2017). Before elaborating on this potential in more detail, it is however necessary to understand better the role of games in organisations.

The role of games in constructing power and competition in business

Games form an integral part in our socialization and education which to a certain degree shape our mindset we take forward in our working lives. Binary thinking pervades our identity, as we are not only naturalized into a binary social construct of gender but also conditioned to think largely in binary terms around competition and the ways organizations foster environments driven by such a win/lose mentality. For example, the gender binary hierarchically positions masculinity as dominant through social and institutional rules over femininity and subordinated masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). This binary dynamic provides the power infused basis of socially expected behaviours and sex role stereotyping of women and men to femininity and masculinity respectively (c.f. Harraway [1987] 1991; Gherardi 1994). In consequence,

such dualist gendered understandings, outside and within organizations, assert power to men and largely deny it to women (Gherardi 1994). Gedro and Mizzi (2014, 453) note:

> 'Binary thinking and categorizing and their concomitant responses and results create and maintain organizational structures and systems that, however unintentionally, privilege dominant paradigms of maleness, masculinity, Whiteness, and heterosexuality'.

Heteronormativity which positions and privileges heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships as 'natural' also naturalizes a heterosexual gender binary, woman/ man, that normalizes gendered power dynamics. That is heterosexuality is privileged over non-heterosexuality and men/ masculinity over women/ femininity. Connell (2015) echoes (Gedro and Mizzi 2014) and highlights the organizational realm is not only dominantly masculine but also heterosexual. Framing gender in relation to heterosexuality then provides a mechanism for controlling and ensuring heterosexual male dominance within the gender hierarchy (Jackson 1987; Rich 1980). Sexuality is used to maintain the asymmetric power structures between women and men as well as keeping men's masculinity in line and subordinated to hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Herek 1987). Connell's (1987) concept of hegemonic masculinity, refers to a socially constructed ideal form of masculinity which is culturally dominant over women and femininities as well as other forms of masculinity in modern Western societies. Thus, positioning women and all LGBQT* in this patriarchal gender order subordinate (Schippers 2007).

In the context of HRD, Bierema (2009) critically demonstrates how HRD historically has been and continues to be dominated and driven by a rationale that upholds masculine values. She further argues that notions of hegemonic masculinity are evident in the way HRD fosters a performance driven agenda (Bierema 2009). This we

can observe in values that pervade dominant managerialist discourse such as competitiveness, control, and instrumentality (Whitehead 2003) which favour masculine characteristics in the game of organizational competition such as career promotion. We invoke the game of *Chess* as a metaphor to illustrate dominant binarized assumptions around gender and sexual orientation.

The game of Chess as means to understanding assumptions regarding gender and sexual orientation

In this section we draw on the metaphor of the game of *Chess* to illustrate the pervasiveness of binary thinking that privileges 'One' over 'Other', draw conceptual links to heteronormativity and the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990) as well as performativity of gender and sexual orientation in line with intelligible norms (Butler 2004).

As one of the oldest strategic games still played world-wide, *Chess* pits two opposing binary players against one another on a checkered board, -- *black and white[4]*, this may transfer to imposed and persisting notions of dual gender (Gherardi 1994) and a binary sexed and gendered social order that render men and masculinity as the norm 'One' and women as the 'Other' (Butler 2004; de Beauvoir 1953). In our metaphor the foundation for a gender power imbalance between 'Other' and 'One', is initially laid by a binary set out between the two opposing players at the start – *black/ white*. This set up is not yet unequal as both players have access to utilise the same number of pieces

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[4] This terminology may imply the possibility to look at the Game board through a race lens. However this particular paper focuses on sexual orientation and gender, though we recognize potential for the use of this metaphor as well as the need to problematize organizational experiences of lesbians beyond sexual orientation and in relation to other queer and diverse experiences such as, for example, race.

across the same number of squares on the board. However, we may argue that some players may be able to position their pieces more effectively on the gameboard as they enjoy societal and institutionalised advantages that leave the other player in an inequitable position. Here we can draw parallels to institutionalised patriarchal structures that privilege men and hegemonic masculinity as the 'One' (Butler 2004; de Beauvoir 1953) as well as rationales in HRD that uphold masculinist values (Bierema 2009; Whitehead 2003).

Beyond this initial binary thinking, to delve somewhat deeper into the metaphor of *Chess*, we argue that the strict rules for demarking value and movement of pieces illustrate the power imbalance of 'One' and 'Other' further. So, for example the King[5], as the game is lost once it is captured, and the Queen, as the most mobile piece, carry higher value than Pawns which can be sacrificed as well as Bishops and Rooks that have a limitation of movement. Therefore, the chess piece set (Pawns, Rooks, Knights, Bishops, Queen and King) harbours an unequal power distribution (Nielsen 2005). One of the key elements in Chess terminology is the element of 'force'[6], that is the capacity of a piece to move from one square to the next and the interplay of other forces on the board. As outlined before not every chess piece projects the same power across the board, i.e. by demonstrating speed and coverage of space in one move (e.g. Queen v Pawn) or being able to access all black/white squares (e.g. Rooks v Bishops). The

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[5] It is important to recognize that in our metaphor the pieces (despite semantics) carry no gender, rather the value to the overall game and the capacity of movement within a set of pieces resembles gendered power dynamics.

[6] It is worthwhile here to note that the term 'force' carries a somewhat masculine connotation of power. As such it is deemed rather pertinent as it supports the argument of pervasive masculinist values that illustrate privilege and dominance of 'One' over 'Other'.

metaphor from this angle highlights binary heteronormative power dynamics (such as female versus male, feminine versus masculine, homosexual versus heterosexual, and so on). It also draws attention to notions of hegemonic masculinity in which a specific masculinity is dominant over both femininity as well as 'lesser' valued masculinities (such as gay masculinities) (Connell 1987).

The chessboard becomes a signifier for space(s) that are conditioned by heteronormativity (Gusmano 2010; Leap 2007) and compulsory heterosexuality (Butler 1990, 1993; Rich 1980). We can observe how some bodies enjoy privileges over others who are restricted in movement and access through established rules, practices, and structures. The rules of the game determine discursive practices that render a subject position viable and intelligible for pieces (Butler 2004). Ultimately scoring bodies within the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990) on a binary scale masculine/ feminine, male/ female, man/ woman, homosexual/ heterosexual – win/lose cementing and reiterating dominant power dynamics.

A Chess metaphor highlights how stereotypical behaviours and practices shape perceptions and lived experiences of 'Others' in organizations. For example, looking at research on persistent power differentials in organisations drawing on concepts such as the glass and lavender ceilings (Gedro 2010b; Hill 2009). Another example of intelligible subject positions manifests in a persistent wage gap, not only based on gender but also in relation to the intersection of gender and sexual orientation (e.g. Laurent and Mihoubi 2012).

For LGBTQ* people, in addition to the gendered dichotomies comes the normalization of heterosexuality that is 'encoded in language, in institutional practices and the encounters of everyday life' (Epstein and Johnson 1994, 198). Heterosexuality which is naturalized, legitimized, and privileged as the norm and the 'One' is pitted

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against the marked, deviant and subversive 'Other' (Butler 1990, 1993). We apply this line of thought to the metaphor of the chessboard to illustrate the power-infused heteronormative backdrop in which LGBTQ* people navigate. We suggest that the rules of the game shift for visible LGBTQ* people, particularly those who are not perceived as homonormative (Duggan 2003). A double bind exacerbates and restricts further the assigned rules of movement and thus the 'force' of the chess piece. For example, imagine certain chess pieces only being allowed to move every second turn.

Whilst gender and sexuality are interwoven, it is important to not conflate these and recognize the 'outsider' status of lesbian women and gay men within the heterosexual matrix that naturalizes straight women and men. That is lesbian women are subordinate to straight women and gay men (albeit being men) occupy a subordinate position in contrast to ideals of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987). Moreover, there is a shift towards opposing expectations aligned with sexuality for visible lesbian women and gay men.

Taking the example of lesbian women, we contest that the constraints for lesbians to become intelligible within the matrix are limiting choices of viable subject positions (Butler 1990). There is evidence for persistent normative stereotypes of lesbian embodiment that suggests a reversal of gender performance for lesbian women to perform more masculinity (Crowder 2012). Wright's (2008) findings also supports this persistence of the 'more' masculine normative conceptions as viable subject positions for lesbian women. She notes that openly lesbian firefighters who may not adopt such 'masculine' forms of behaviour, were less readable as they could not be readily put into either the 'woman' nor the 'one of the guys' box. Such a drive for stereotypical behaviour perpetuates heteronormativity and the dominance of hegemonic masculinity, particularly in the context of a heavily male dominated occupation.

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Bierema (2009) highlights that the valuing of masculine behaviour is indicative of gendered social expectations of the ideal worker and the prevailing notion of performance driven organizations based on masculine rationality. As mentioned earlier, the hegemonic and heteronormative nature of work is also evident in wage differentials between lesbian, gay and heterosexual workers. Studies show that gay men earn less than their counterpart while lesbian women earn more than heterosexual women (e.g. Blandford 2003; Clain and Leppel 2001; Laurent and Mihoubi 2012).

The drive for intelligibility and repeated discursive practices of viable subject positions (Butler 2004) form the basis of rules in the game assigning movement to chess pieces that is in line with heteronormative, binary understandings of gender and sexual orientation. Calculated, observed, and anticipated moves across the chessboard set out and off expectations towards specific learned responses from opposing chess players. In order to become visible on the board (such as in LGBTQ* inclusion agendas) one must play along within confinements of the rules of this game by repeating conventions and discursive practices expected for the respective subject position (Butler 1990). That is for example as lesbian woman to become intelligible by performing gender and sexual orientation along stereotypical, expected lines in order to fit a hetero/homonormative agenda (Duggan 2003). Rather than challenging heteronormative mainstream, the lesbian woman becomes integrated and accepted within the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990) and any queer 'otherness' is silenced. Whilst such a position extends the woman/ female/ feminine binary pole, it does not break away or disrupt the game itself within which homonormative LGBT performances are still (de)valued as the necessary 'Other' to the dominant 'One'.

To summarize, the gameboard that is set out for players and game pieces is one that enforces unequal dichotomies of gender underpinned by naturalized heterosexual

assumptions of pieces in the game. These power dichotomies manifest in organizations in forms of gendered oppositionality where women and femininities in all bodies are less valued, e.g. in leadership context. We see a perpetuation of feminine (nurturing) characteristics positioned oppositional to more performative and 'desirable' characteristics that, when demonstrated, allow access to different pathways and possibilities to move on the board for the 'performers' (e.g. promotion). Lesbian women particularly, encounter a potential to exploit hegemonic masculine structures in performing and playing into stereotypes. However, instead of disruption such performances only reiterate binary power structures and reinforce the devaluing of 'Otherness'. Rather than being restrained by norms and 'playing along' the rules we propose to engage in this game more queerly by becoming more unruly and 'playful with' such conventional normative assumptions.

From 'Game' to 'Play' - opening space for LGBTQ* difference

Building on the metaphor of *Chess* to illustrate prevalent dominant power structures impacting on LGBTQ* bodies, it is important to note that there is seemingly little space for 'other' sexual and gender minorities who identify outside binarized labels. We contend that multiplicities and identities outside of normative binaries may present opportunities to engage in confusing moves, that is queer practices and behaviours that offer a pathway into creating confusion in how bodies may be read and made sense of within the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990; Kelan 2010).

To some extent, this confusion may be translated to the metaphor of *Chess* when players draw on queer moves that are less well-known and as such are surprising and 'amusing' when played (Pollock W.H.K. as quoted in Urcan and Hilbert (2017, 467). That is whilst the rules of movement are fixed, there is still space for uncertainty in the unpredictability of how pieces are strategically placed and how the other player can read

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and counteract the move (Costikyan 2013). Such practices do not offer a radical divergence in movement of pieces within the rules and the context of the game however (i.e. performativity of gender) but only allow for the opportunity of resignification (Butler 1993) and to perform gender less intelligibly within the limits of normative conceptions. In the following we imagine 'Play'ing with games in a way that disrupts set rules. That is, what happens if chess pieces would start to move more queerly, outside of their move repertoire, or even occupied multiple squares at the same time?

Previously we have outlined how heteronormative structures limit and devalue available embodiments for LGBTQ* people within a binary driven 'Game' conditioned by heteronormativity (*Chess*). When examining games for possibilities to disrupt, it is useful to highlight how queer theory has been utilised to study videogames and gender through the field of queer game studies (Ruberg and Shaw 2017) and by queergaming (Chang 2017). Queer game studies can be divided into two areas of examination (Clark 2017). One strand focusing on diversifying the content of games and representation of marginalized identities in the industry, by introducing a greater diversity of stories, characters, and voices into games. The second strand begins to investigate how to queer the structure of games by questioning norms and conventions on how games are expected to function (Clark 2017).

A large body of work within queer games studies sheds light onto the first strand - LGBTQ* inclusivity. For example, increasingly mainstream video games are including LGBTQ* characters and embodiments (Ruberg 2018) into existing normative game constructs by including content on same-sex *sex*, 'queer' marriage or couple plots (Chang 2017). Such a direction can be viewed as mere assimilation of LGBTQ* identities into heteronormative mainstream (Duggan 2004; Halperin 2012; Slagle 2007). Chang (2017) points out that the inroad for diversity in mainstream games lies in

tokenistic inclusion and flattened, oftentimes stereotypical representations. Ruberg and Shaw (2017) contend, in many cases within the gaming industry that such attention to LGBTQ* representation largely reflects capitalistic concerns of tapping into a 'new market' and the pink pound, rather than moral and social justice values. We see such assimilationist workings also when critically examining inclusive diversity policies driven by business case rationales which are largely framed by mainstream, homo- and heteronormative discourses. Thus, the first strand of queer games studies does not challenge hetero/ homonormative mainstream but rather replicates normative power structures and privilege by selling the illusion of inclusion of 'otherness'.

Whilst traditionally within game studies video games have been seen and analysed as a 'medium and an industry (that) have been aligned with the forces of hegemony and empire' (Ruberg and Phillips 2018, 2), they are also a site of opportunity to promote LGBTQ* diversity and thus can be instrumental as a space of resistance. That is, whilst they are a space in which social expectations of gender and sexuality can be confirmed by *playing along normatively* and/or '*playing it straight*' (Chang 2017), they are also a medium to trouble the 'Game' and explore new ways of being (Ruberg 2018). We draw on this second arena of queer games studies that aims to challenge structures and expected functions of games. This strand brings to the fore the radical potential of games that invokes queer theory's drive to resist 'regimes of the normal' (Warner 1993, xvi) and its 'attitude of unceasing disruptiveness' (Parker 2001, 38). Games in this light may open some room for players to challenge established boundaries and to break with what is normatively comfortable.

By refusing to '"play the game" of dominant culture (Ruberg 2018, 552) and imagining to engage with games in a queer(er) way the second strand of queer games

studies (Clark 2017) highlights possibilities to switch to a mode of queergaming (Chang 2017). Chang (2017, 19) coins the term queergaming as:

> 'engaging 'different grammars of play, radical play, not grounded in normative ideologies like competition, exploitation, colonization, speed, violence, rugged individualism, levelling up, and win states'.

It allows for questioning underlying norms and a queering of structures and rules (Clark 2017; Ruberg 2018). In the following, we outline the queergaming values of *queer(er) design* and *queer(er) play* (Chang 2017) to illustrate how these values, in the metaphor of *MMORPG* offer a way forward to open space for LGBTQ* difference and to 'Play' with the 'Game' to disrupt conventional, binary assumptions.

Queer(er) design aims to progress the development of games beyond binary normative thinking. It is not enough to window dress the otherwise unchanged heteronormative narrative by inserting a homonormative 'queer' character. Instead we need to create games in which characters embodiments are at least not fixed to basic binary choices such as female/ male or gay/ straight, and their paths not limited by predestined decision trees, or normative narratives with the ultimately achievement of a win state. We argue that MMORPG*s* may provide players with platforms set in a cyberspace that are initially not tied to the reality of their bodies. This may allow for room to somewhat break away from the limitations of binary thinking and intelligible significations within the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990). One can choose an avatar and develop a character to explore new ways of being in the cyberspace of the MMORPG. In this realm it is possible to both develop a character that enjoys privilege 'One' as well as a character that embodies the 'Other'.

Gender identity in this 'Other's' space is less restrictive as avatars do not need to match 'real' life and also one may develop more than one character. This opens the

opportunity for players to (re)cross gendered binaries and to some extent rattle foundations of gender power dynamics as one 'real' player can become and perform socially intelligible norms (Butler 2004) through recitation of discursive practices (Butler 1995) through and within multiple cyberspace avatars simultaneously. In *2nd Life*, for example, one can start the game with an avatar that is either 'male', 'female' or 'Gender-Variant/Non-Binary'. Here the MMORPG allows players to more clearly break with heteronormativity by stepping outside the gendered dichotomy. Therefore, the limits of gender identity construction are far less restricted than within clearly defined rules of *Chess*. Moreover, *2nd Life* allows for the player to shape and switch their gender identity as the virtual body can be adjusted and altered for example by purchasing[7] several attachable male and/or female genitalia to carry in one's inventory (Matviyenko 2010). Such game design effectively allows the avatar to shift between different capacities to move and interact within the game. Drawing links to the metaphor of *Chess* the avatar is potentially capable to embody and perform in the form of all chess pieces. As a result, we can see possibilities within such MMORPGs to re(enact) more queerer identities by performing gender through different and shifting bodies and blur lines of heteronormative power dynamics.

A further potential for opening more multiplicity and disruption presents itself by queer(er) play and seeking to shift towards queer forms, queer being and queer modes of play (Halberstam 2017). For instance, players draw on possibilities of non-competitive, non-productive, non-judgmental 'Play' against original normative intents of a game's design (Chang 2017) not designed for queer subjects. For example, without

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[7] Considering that these genital attachments can be purchased suggests how neoliberal and capitalist systems have been applied by users and infiltrated the free form of 'Play'

the player driving towards a win end state, potential is created to move past a win/lose dichotomy. Such play seeks a less quantifiable outcome (Kapp 2012) and invites exploration of performativity that is confusing (Kelan 2010) and less readable regarding intelligible norms (Butler 2004). Chang (2017) highlights a World of Warcraft player called Everbloom of the Feathermoon server who levelled up to maximum (then level 85) without killing any in-game creature but by roaming the game world and developing the avatar's skills.

MMORPGs such as *2nd Life* do not necessarily set out a specific task-completion goal to achieve but present an open world to explore together with others. The multiplayer nature enables to 'Play' without end state, inviting exploration of the game world and cooperation with other players. It allows people to express and interact with identity (whether this is dress, appearance, name), to some extent, without the repercussions of heteronormative policing. The online nature of the MMORPG adds an element of anonymity and safety which perhaps empowers players to express difference in gender and sexual identity more freely. The cyberspace context of online gaming in this regard allows for players to engage in queer(er) 'Play'. There is the opportunity for gender performativity (Butler 1990) which may 'hack straight (*and* homonormative) narratives' (Halberstam 2017, 187, our emphasis) in order to become less readable within the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990). This way queergaming aims to tap into the possibilities of uncertainty by drawing on and bringing to the fore glitches, i.e. transient faults within the design of the game.

A glitch in the game matrix presents a mistake, a bug that distracts from the illusion of a perfect construct. As such glitches present opportunities for unpredictable ways to perform and transformative modes of 'Play' (Halberstam 2017) beyond normative conceptions. The glitch is thus concerned with flaws, cracks, fissures in the

matrix in a way that exposes the aporia of the matrix (Butler 1993). It is not that the player contests the matrix, but they expose and tap into flaws so that the matrix itself starts to fail because it is not able to exhaust the supplement and integrate it seamlessly. In such a way failure and fault within the matrix become fruitful avenues for queer subjects to engage in confusing alternatives and perform queer subject positions outside and across normative conceptions in order to 'hack straight narratives and insert their own algorithms for time, space, life and desire' (Halberstam 2017, 187).

In summary, MMORPG present opportunity for disruption by its potential for queer(er) 'Play'ing with assumptions and identities to expose cracks in the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990). We contend that queergaming values of queer(er) design and play may present a pathway to disrupt heteronormativity within organizational settings. Organizational spaces present loci in which players may reimagine, stretch, and form the rules of the 'Game' and how it is played.

Implications

We have used games as a metaphor for understanding how individuals position and present themselves within organizations, an experience particularly salient for individuals who identify as LGBTQ*. Games are integral to the structure and practices of organizational life at both explicit and implicit levels. *How* we come to know what we know carries important lessons (Callahan 2007)— the 'Game' of *Chess* reflects binaries and boundaries, while *MMORPG* show potential to develop our understandings of gender and knowledge beyond binaries towards flexibility and fluidity. This has implications for how we 'Play' with and disrupt hegemonic systems.

We contend that such a rewrite necessitates transformation at both organizational and individual levels. Working together, organizational and individual action can transform the game from the win/lose based *Chess* to not to win/ no loss

MMORPG. Highlighting and making visible the individual performance(s) as 'glitch' in such an endeavour is one part, however it is also necessary to highlight the role of organizations to create a different kind of gameboard to enable players to approach and engage the game with different rules. Particularly as organizations are spaces in which hegemonic, patriarchal structures are systematically perpetuated and strengthened, and where existing binaries are reified.

Individual level – performing the 'glitch'

Individual agency for lesbian women to engage in non-normative, unpredictable gender performance, manifests in challenging and unsettling gendered boundaries using language, space, and symbolism vehicles.

Language

First, individuals are regularly confronted with heteronormative assumptions regarding their sexuality that can be addressed via language. Verbal jujitsu (Bierema 2010a) is a mechanism by which individuals can redirect gendered comments to remind others of their heteronormative assumptions. For example, a respondent in a study of lesbian gendered expectations by [author(s)] (2015) commented, "…she said something about, 'so have you got a boyfriend?' and I said, 'no, I don't think my girlfriend would like it.'" This type of response reveals the heteronormative assumption that positions the straight 'One' as winning above the lesbian 'Other' that is devalued. Vocalization of this power dynamic offers a way to awareness and allows negotiation of positions without being confrontational. It also presents a disruptive position as 'glitch' that clashes with expected heteronormative dialogue. Language also includes the articulation of one's own preferred name and pronouns (acting as a role model) as well as creating opportunities to ask about colleagues preferred names and pronouns and honouring

them across a number of formal or informal settings such as for example email, in-person meetings, name badges, business cards and so on (HRC, 2019) and where family names are often based on heteronormative marriage structures that repeat patrilineal patterns (Butler, 2000).

Space

Second, the way individuals chose to project their identities in the way they construct their workspaces is an example of individual agency. Is there a name plate displayed on the office door, what titles are used? Ms., Mrs. Mx, Miss? Or is a professional title used differently for binary gender and sexuality identities? What pictures do people choose to display in their office? This type of signalling similarly to visual signalling (e.g. Clarke and Turner 2007; Skidmore 1999) can particularly challenge heteronormative assumptions. As a participant in [author(s)]'s (2015) study commented, "I've got two boys and I've got pictures everywhere and I've got my ring and my flags everywhere… they just find it difficult to make the connection." Here by enacting and conforming to both gendered heteronormative expectations (motherhood, marriage) for women as well as displaying lesbian sexual orientation (e.g. boasting a rainbow flag in her office space), the participant becomes intelligible in both realms of gender and lesbian sexual orientation. The result of which is that colleagues find it difficult to bring both together. This challenges normative conceptions and we argue opens up space to negotiate available subject positions. Similarly, to the unfixed development of *MMORPG* avatars identity, here we can see how people can tap into or jump around ('glitch') between available subject positions that do not necessarily match to fixed binaries. In doing so, they are less easily fixed to a win/lose dichotomy within the 'Game'.

Symbols

Third, individuals can symbolically represent themselves in different ways, principally with their appearance through clothing and grooming. What choices do they make regarding clothing, and why? How do they make use of personal grooming as a signifier? Dress and appearance constitute a way to signal sexual identity (Clarke and Turner 2007) in order to establish oneself as readable and intelligible within a binary-based system, like *Chess*. At the same time, a practical implication of taking a *MMORPG* mindset allows us to play with established boundaries of what constitutes normative expectations for lesbians and allows the individual to create a sense of confusion. An example from [author(s)] (2015) illustrates this,

> "I have my hair long, my makeup, my nails, nice jewellery…I wear a pink shirt…so this is the thing that gets them. …they think they're going to get one thing and then all of a sudden, I'm gripping their hand putting myself in their body space … [T]hey don't know how to deal with that, but then they find out I'm gay. It is like, 'Alright she is a man-hating bitch.'"

This example illustrates how incongruent and unexpected behaviour and appearance may result in confusion. Whilst the participant's appearance and grooming align with expectations of becoming intelligible and credible as a straight woman (Butler 1990; Jeanes 2007), her more aggressive behaviour and business attire causes dissonance for, in particular, her male colleagues. Interestingly, this confusion is dissolved once colleagues found out she identifies as a lesbian. As expectations shift towards becoming intelligible as a lesbian woman (i.e. here behaving in a more masculine manner), heteronormative assumptions are enforced resulting in her fitting better into a system which favours masculinities. Nevertheless, her example of multiple, incongruent performance that crosses and potentially queers credible boundaries between gender and sexual orientation opens up space for resignification of what is allowable (Butler 1993).

We argue that a more fluid *MMORPG* approach has more meaningful practical implications for lesbians because it demonstrates an opportunity to disrupt the binary and reflects fluidity of boundaries.

Organizational level

Taking advantage of the flexibility and fluidity of individual performances and agency is only a starting point that needs a supportive organizational engagement concerning advocacy, education, and organizational change towards LGBTQ* inclusion to thrive.

Advocacy

Oftentimes, recommendations for HRD practitioners include the encouragement to promote diversity programs (see e.g. Collins et al. 2015; McFadden 2015) or to found employee resource groups or diversity councils (Raeburn 2004) for organizations to become more inclusive and advocate for change. There needs to be caution however not to treat such advocacy as a tick box exercise that is justified by a business case for diversity argument to merely enhance performance and profitability in the organization. This includes using the business case for diversity as the rationale to show advantages and convince all employees of the benefits for the organization to include LGBTQ* diversity such as more productive and committed workers (Madera 2010; Day and Schoenrade 1997, 2000). As Bierema (2010b) argues such programs that make the case for diversity rather fail to address inherent gendered power structures by viewing diversity in light of a performance driven agenda that justifies its existence in a masculinist frame by means of profitability. She highlights:

> 'weak initiatives include programs that make the business case for diversity. Such
> programs cast diversity in a performative light and make valuing it tolerable to

those it threatens because it is profitable. Yet, such programs fail to address structural power relations that protect white males in organizations and prevent the development and advancement of marginalized workers based on race, gender, class, sexuality or other positionalities' (Bierema 2010b, 571).

This reiterates that drives for diversity often result in the institutionalization of performance-oriented measures within organizations. These however neglect to recognize that the very measures may hold the equitable advancement of LGBTQ* employees back, let alone transform an inherently masculinist system idolizing a win end state. Awareness and a conscious move away from setting up normative initiatives that merely feed into a gameboard reinforcing such dynamics is necessary.

Education

Awareness increasing initiatives are necessary to become more knowledgeable about the experiences and rights of LGBT[8] workers (Brooks and Edwards 2009), the choices LGBT people face (Gedro 2009), and to create a more inclusive workplace (Collins and Callahan 2012). Brooks and Edwards (2009) point towards HRD venues such as new employee orientation, diversity training, management training, and ally training to become more inclusive and educated. Given the hegemonic power structures (Bierema 2009) and professional context continuing to be bound by heterosexuality and masculinity (Collins and Callahan, 2012), the heteronormative, gendered standards for workplace skills and competencies remain difficult to challenge and change (Collins et al. 2015). Gedro and Mizzi (2014) point towards feminist theory and queer theory as a potent lens through which to critically examine HRD scholarship and practice and aide the development of meaningful development and training programs.

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[8] Note how the papers do not extend beyond binary thinking to include queer(er) identities.

We therefore propose a queerer approach that moves beyond the visibility of homonormative LGBT embodiments to include queerer identities that have been left absent from and silenced by the HRD discourse. We call to stop 'Game'ing within heteronormative power structures and begin to 'Play' with these to subvert.

Organizational change

Creating a work environment that is aware and critical of heteronormativity and gendered binaries is a keystone to inform change strategies to develop more inclusive organizational cultures which seek to affect meaningful change for the inclusion of people who do not identify on a binary pole of gender and sexuality.

Such organizational supportive change includes LGBTQ* training that moves beyond the basic 'day workshop' on what LGBT is (often a homonormative binarized understanding) and why it is commercially important for us to be inclusive of sexual minorities. It necessitates fundamental change throughout the organization that is aware of and refrains from reinforcing power structures that make up the 'Game'. This may start by stripping away binaries that lead to gendered conditions but needs to be continued in acknowledging asymmetrical gendered power relations and empowering all in the organization to challenge these structures and each other in the ways we re-inscribe and police these. For example, it is simply not enough to introduce a learning and development tool such as LGBT training that perpetuates stereotypical normative assumptions of sexual minorities and reinforces a them/us binary set by heteronormativity. This also involves an organizing beyond mere LGBTQ* networks that reflect and potentially replicate such a division; straight/ LGBTQ*, homonormative LGBT/ non-normative LGBTQ*.

Language, space, and symbols

To begin this process, the same concepts of language, space, and symbolism are primary vehicles for transforming previously highly gendered spaces and language into more 'neutral' conditions. Regarding language changes, organizations could consider changing policies to use non-binary pronouns (i.e., 'they' instead of 'she' and 'he'). This also includes creating opportunities on an organizational level, and in conversation with employees, to ask for or offer preferred pronouns. While best practice may differ across organizational contexts, HRC (2019) suggests opportune moments such as creating a place to declare preferred names and pronouns during the interview process and onboarding process. They further highlight the importance to allow employees to self-identify within corporate social networks or platforms and digital directories rather than imposing a binary gender identity. Other areas HRC (2019) raise include the opportunity to use personal pronouns in email signature lines and actively making offering personal pronouns part of introduction processes at the start of meetings or events.

Another classic gendered policy language regards having children; instead of using maternity and paternity leave to create binary conditions for leave. Whilst the blanket use of 'parental' leave may cover all forms of welcoming a child into the family, however this still repeats a bias to heteronormativity that foregrounds a child as the 'future' of heteronormative relations and does not cover other forms and ties of family (Edelman 2004). Family leave may include a broader, more fluid definition for example also include to care for (a) partner(s).

Associated with policy language, is also the gendered enforcement of these policies—what policies are followed, and which policies are overlooked for gendered convenience? In changing the use of space, an obvious choice, albeit charged, is to offer

toilets as combined use spaces instead of strictly gendered facilities. To further converge gender binaries, these combined use spaces could be given a central and easily accessible location to encourage and normalize their use across all gender identities.

Consideration of how symbolism is used to represent gendered conditions is another area ripe for change—how are colour schemes used to depict gendered roles, what corporate artwork is displayed, how does the corporate logo and brand represent its underlying values. These, and surely many other, gender convergence actions shift the gameboard from the binary-based *Chess* to a more flexible, negotiated space like *MMORPG*, which enables individuals to agentically represent themselves.

Conclusions

Heteronormativity and the power dynamics upheld by pressures and limits of signification within the heterosexual matrix prevail and continue to restrict LGBTQ* identities. The dynamic of such restrictions and rules of movement was explored in relation to the dichotomous outset of the chessboard and the metaphorical rules of *Chess*. In order to disrupt set ingrained understandings of gender and sexual orientation, we suggested a move to establishing game 'Play' that allows for more fluidity such as in the case of some *MMORPG*. Queergaming based upon players' negotiation of game space without drive for a win end state and development of characters and alliances that cross heteronormative boundaries, may open up possibilities to adopt subject positions previously unavailable. By enacting subject positions beyond normative conceptions we may tap into and expose flaws in the matrix of the 'Game'. Mobilizing notions of queer theory to unsettle what is normative by emphasizing performance that is at odds with the normal, this article suggests pathways on individual and organizational levels.

Organizations have started to address LGBTQ* inclusivity; however, we contest that such efforts reinforce established hetero/homonormative conceptions rather than to

break them down, creating a 'gay friendly closet' in which lesbians are pushed into subject positions intelligible with the 'Other'. To break through a cycle of assimilation into unchanged mainstream, this paper set out organizational spaces as potential catalysts to begin remodelling the gameboard and its rules.

As a starting point to such a remodelling, the vehicles of language, space and symbolism are offered to strip away gendered conditions and open the possibility to converge gendered barriers on individual and organizational levels. Organizational commitment to queer(er) play and individuals 'glitching' and negotiating unusual subject positions may form pathways for queer(er) organizational environments. Ultimately, we argue towards a refusal to engage with the 'Game' of the matrix, but instead play with its rules and restrictions to invoke uncomfortableness and confusion which may lead towards an erosion of what is known and perpetuated. Queer(er) 'Play'ing with the boundaries of gender and sexual orientation expression in this way may bring along a diminishing of the hold a heteronormative regime imposes on us.

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