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Gender Versus Sex

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Summary and Keywords

Gender research goes beyond adding sex as an independent, explanatory category. To conduct gender research in the field of business and management, therefore, it is important to apply a more sophisticated understanding of gender that resonates with contemporary gender theory. This entails taking the social construction of gender and its implications for research into consideration. Seeing gender as a social construct means that the perception of “women” and “men,” of “femininity/ties” and “masculinity/ties,” is the outcome of an embodied social practice.

Gender research is commonly sensitive to notions of how power is reproduced and challenges concepts such as “hegemonic masculinity” and “heteronormativity.” The first highlights power relations between gender groups, as well as the different types of existing masculinities. The latter emphasizes the pressure to rely on a binary concept of “women” and “men” and how this is related to heterosexuality, desire, and the body. Gender research needs to avoid the pitfalls of a narrow, essentialist concept of “women” and “men” that draws on this binary understanding of gender. It is also important to notice that not all women (or men) share the same experiences. The critique of Black feminists and scholars from the global South promoted the idea of intersectionality and postcolonialism within gender research. Intersectionality addresses the entanglement of gender with other social categories, such as age, class, disability, race, or religion, while postcolonial approaches criticize the neglect of theory and methodology originating in the global South and question the prevalence of concepts from the global North.

Various insights from gender theory inform business and management research in various ways. Concepts such as the “gendered organization” or “inequality regime” can be seen as substantial contributions of gender theory to organization theory. Analyzing different forms of masculinities and exploring ways in which gender is undone within organizations (or whether a supposedly gender-neutral organization promotes a masculine norm) can offer thought-provoking insights into organizational processes. Embracing queer theory, intersectionality, and postcolonial approaches in designing research allows for a broader image of the complex social reality. Altogether management studies benefit from sound, theoretically well-grounded gender research.

Keywords: sex, gender, gendered organizations, performativity, intersectionality, inequality regime, heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity, postcolonialism

Introduction

Sex and gender are basic categories of how human existence is described and experienced. Consequently, sex and gender affect many areas of research within management and business studies even if they are left unexamined or underexamined. Much research simply uses sex as an explanatory variable, which misses the wider contribution that a focus on gender research could offer (for a review in this regard, see Ely & Padavic, 2007). This article argues that sound gender research needs to be embedded in and interpreted through an adequate, gender-aware theoretical framework. As will be shown, both theory and empirical insights (including the methods appropriated for gender research) can benefit from embracing gender theory.

The article starts with an outline of key gender-related concepts and ways to go beyond a binary gender construct. Subsequently, the contribution of gender theory to business and management research is exemplified with its impact on organization studies, outlining some of the major theoretical developments regarding gender and organization. Emerging research questions that embrace the complexity and richness of social life by drawing on intersectional or queer approaches are then discussed. Finally, some guiding principles and questions that shape gender research and provide some suggestions as to what novel research on gender can look like are proposed.

Gender and Sex

The terms *gender* and *sex* are often used interchangeably. *Gender* is originally a linguistic term indicating the grammatical sex of a word. The term was adopted by scholars and activists associated with second-wave feminism in the early 1970s to distance the perceived differences between women and men from nature and emphasize their social basis. Second-wave feminists elaborated on the idea that gender is constructed and based on a set of expectations, stereotypes, norms, and attributes that are performed more or less well by individuals in accordance with their ascribed sex. *Gender* was introduced to distinguish the social from the biological sphere for which the label *sex* was maintained (for a discussion on the terminology, see Scott, 1986). *Sex* is often confined to reproductive organs, hormones, or sex-specific abilities, while *gender* is associated with the sociocultural framework around sex, including but not limited to the societal rules ascribed to femininity and masculinity (Oakley, 2016 [1972]). The introduction of *gender* as a term allows an analytical space that can show how expectations and performances of femininity and masculinity are produced within a sociocultural framework (Bradley, 2007) that strongly relies on power, oppression, and subordination (Rubin, 1975; Scott, 1986). Scott (1986, p. 1067) argues that gender has two main aspects: "gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power." Power emerges from and is shown in the division of labor, as well as in family relations (Rubin, 1975). Yet those power relations are subtle and evasive, rather than straightforward and unilateral (Connell, 2003; Bourdieu, 2001).

In addition to the distinction between gender and sex, West and Zimmerman (1987) introduce the concept of "sex categorization." This refers to the external identification of a person's sex, which is not necessarily in line with the person's sex. For example, someone could be perceived as a woman but in fact be a biological man. By not engaging with the terminology or failing to grasp their important meanings, studies run the risk of reducing the gender analytical space and hindering a pertinent and much-needed reflection on how gender processes operate.

The Social Construction of Gender

Most people would agree there is a difference between women and men, as there is a difference in the biological human body when it comes to reproductive organs, hormones, and relative size. Yet, "our bodies are too complex to provide clear-cut answers about sexual difference. The more we look for a simple physical basis for 'sex,' the more it becomes clear that 'sex' is not a pure physical category" (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, p. 4). Throughout history, the social construction of sex shows on how people with ambiguous sex were treated (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Aristotle believed that the heat of the heart, rather than external genitalia, defined femaleness or maleness. Medieval physicians assumed a continuum between women and men. They believed that a fetus's growing position within the womb defined a person's sex. In the 19th century, biologists and physicists defined *intersex* as an abnormality that had to be corrected by assuming either

the one of the other sex. This was mainly done through measuring the size of the external genitalia. This illustrates that the demarcation lines between women and men reflect a dominant set of beliefs and ideals, rather than a universal differentiation that is stable across time and space.

Nonetheless, the so-called natural essence of gender roles continues to be presented as common sense. Seemingly logical links are drawn between differences in hormones, muscle structure, and reproductive organs with different competencies, even though these links usually fail to be established empirically. For instance, women are portrayed as being better suited for childcare, as if having reproductive organs and the potential for childbirth gave them an innate maternal instinct. Leaving aside the fact that on average, women spend only a very small fraction of their lifetimes being pregnant or breastfeeding,[1] the whole notion that women are better caregivers needs to be recognized as a social construction largely created by stereotypes.

Research into the historical role of mothers shows that the conception of maternal instinct is closely aligned with a certain vision that we hold of motherhood. Badinter (1980, 2012) illustrates this by showing that different interpretations can be given of the behaviors of mothers, depending on the perspective adopted. It was, for instance, common in the 18th and 19th century in urban France to assign the care of infants and toddlers to “milk nannies” who lived in more rural areas. Two possible interpretations have been provided for this phenomenon. The first suggests that at the time, parents were more detached from their young children, probably owing to the high infant mortality rate. This kind of disengagement is at odds with our current conception of maternal instinct. The second interpretation proposes that infants were sent to the countryside because they would fare better away from the polluted environment of urban areas. This second interpretation is more aligned with our contemporary notion of maternal instinct, as it has the well-being of children at its core. These two opposing interpretations demonstrate how our own taken-for-granted assumptions about gender and maternal instinct can lead to different conclusions based on the same empirical evidence.

Gender theory shows that many differences attributed to women and men, such as supposedly gender-specific communication styles, are socially constructed. It demonstrates that while women and men can be divided into two dichotomous subgroups, many characteristics associated with either women or men are socially learned rather than rooted in biology. In fact, taking sex differences for granted is the result of and the basis for masculine domination (Bourdieu, 2001). By not seeing differences between women and men as natural, but instead as socially constructed, it is then possible to understand the process by which meaning is given to gender (Goffman, 1976, 1977; West & Zimmerman, 1987). This is largely achieved through the imposition onto sexed bodies of a gendered system of thought and set of beliefs. Groups are formed on the basis of biological differences, titled “women” and “men,” and which are then assigned “feminine”

and “masculine” gender labels that refer to value-laden characteristics, traits, and behaviors.

Gender scholars have long attempted to dismantle the idea that sex differences are natural or innate. Interest in social or psychological differences between women and men originated in the 1920s in the field of sociology and psychology, and continued in the 1930s with the development of many tests that claimed to be able to measure “femininity” or “masculinity” (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985; Connell, 2003). Second-wave feminists started to engage in capturing a rather dichotomous notion of femininity and masculinity in the 1970s. Hausen (1976), for instance, examines the roots of modern gender characteristics by analyzing lexica of the 18th and early 19th centuries. She elaborates on how these “books of facts” defined the modern woman and man, placed them in different spheres (woman: private versus man: public), and ascribed different traits and competencies to each (passivity/activity, emotion/rationality, being/doing). Similar ascriptions are tested in the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974): “Feminine” items include compassion, loyalty, sensitivity to the needs of others, understanding, and yielding, whereas “masculine” items comprise ambition, being assertive, being individualistic, leadership abilities, and self-reliance. Bem (1974) emphasizes the necessity to construct femininity and masculinity independent of each other, and therefore the BSRI also includes presumably neutral, androgynous items, such as being helpful, happy, sincere, secretive, or tactful.

Gender is thus not based on innate or natural sex-based differences, but instead represents a deeply embodied social practice. Butler (1993) shows, through the process that she calls “‘girling’ of the girl,” (Butler, 1993, p. 7) how babies (and more particularly girls, since they are constructed in opposition to the masculine norm) are gender-labeled even prior to birth and are maintained in that category through repeated performance and interactions. The social practice of gendering individuals, thus, is maintained over time through daily interactions. For example, Martin (2003) describes an occasion in which two vice presidents of a *Fortune* 100 company, one woman and one man, were walking along a corridor when a phone rang. Without thinking much about it, the man asked the woman vice president to answer the phone, implicitly putting her in the role of a secretary. Such minor incidents of daily interaction establish—as Martin (2003) points out—a gendered order that people are often not aware of and that is reinstated through repeated gendered practices.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Gender research is often depicted as research that focuses on women. Yet, men are gendered, too. The fact that men are rarely addressed explicitly as men in research is less a sign of neglect (indeed, men are disproportionately represented as research subjects) than an indicator of a position of privilege. *Privilege* in this context means that the inherent attributes (in this case masculinity and being a man) are considered as the norm while the "Other" is either ignored or stands out. For instance, early works on bureaucracies and Taylorism neglected the gendered composition of workers and reproduced the masculine norm as universally valid (Acker & Houten, 1974; Bendl, 2008). Then again, women in (numerically) minority positions are often highly visible tokens whose presence attracts attention, making it hard for them to become a "normal," fully accepted member (Gherardi, 1994; Haas, Koeszegi, & Zedlacher, 2016; Kanter, 1993). In both cases, men are not explicitly mentioned, but implicitly they are the norm. In the words of Collinson and Hearn (1994, p. 3):

> The categories of men and masculinity are frequently central to analyses, yet they remain taken for granted, hidden and unexamined. Men are both talked about and ignored, rendered simultaneously explicit and implicit. They are frequently at the centre of discourse but they are rarely the focus of interrogation.

Not making men's gender explicit and visible means that research risks reproducing an implicit masculine norm and existing power relations. It is important to recognize that not all men are in a position of privilege, nor do all types of masculinity carry the same power and influence. Different intersections, such as age, sexuality, or class, might result in very different standpoints in terms of privilege. Specific types of masculinities encounter more stereotypes and rejection than others. This can be seen when men take on caretaking responsibilities, such as parental leave (Murgia & Poggio, 2009, 2013), or enter feminized professions, such as nursery teachers (Buschmeyer, 2013) or nurses (Cottingham, Johnson, & Taylor, 2016). The implicit underlying hierarchy of gender, in which men are construed as more powerful and through which a powerful and prestigious type of masculinity is more appreciated than other stigmatized masculinities, is called *hegemonic masculinity* (Connell, 2003).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity is used to emphasize power relations among gender groups and among the range of different masculinities that coexist (Carrigan et al., 1985; Connell, 2003; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The term *hegemony* describes the ways that a dominant group maintains its dominance (Hearn, 2004). It refers to a prevalent social group that tacitly safeguards its privileges. Consequently, a hegemonic group can exist only if there is at least one subordinated group. Hegemony is based on three main aspects (Carrigan et al., 1985): First, hegemony recognizes that there are hierarchical power relations both among and within gender groups. Second, hegemony contributes to deepening unequal power relations, such as those expressed through the division of labor. Third, hegemony relies on maintaining *cathexis*, which refers to emotionally charged

social relations that can be simultaneously hostile and affectionate (Connell, 2003). This includes—but is not limited to—different forms of socially accepted sexual desires. Hegemonic masculinity is thus based on gendered power relations and a key mechanism used to maintain those power relations. It recognizes that power and domination do not belong to all men (or to the "average" man), but instead to those who conform to what is widely accepted as "ideal" masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Consequently, not all men—not even the majority of men, in fact—belong to the hegemonic group.

Heteronormativity

A strong relation also exists between a binary gender concept and the normative pressure of heterosexuality, often referred to as *heteronormativity* (Jackson, 2006; Warner, 1991). Heteronormative pressure involves the need to construct an unambiguous sex identity that coincides with both the corresponding gender identity and biological sex. This serves to maintain a clear model of who and how women and men ought to be. The pervasiveness of heteronormativity shows in the way that intersex and transgender individuals are often treated (Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Köllen, 2016; Thanem & Wallenberg, 2016). Being *intersex* means to be born with ambiguous sex, such as having both a penis and a vagina or having a chromosomal variation that does not correspond to the usual configurations (to name two of its many forms). It is not clear how many people fall within the category of intersex. Based on a meta-analysis of the literature published from 1955 to 2000, Blackless et al. (2000) estimate that 2% of all live births differ from the ideal female or male sex.[2] Even though that proportion is not negligable, the issue of intersexuality remains largely taboo and neglected. For a long time, physicians urged parents to agree to long-lasting medical procedures aimed at assigning an unambiguous sex to a newborn—and the practice continues to some extent today (Creighton, Michala, Mushtaq, & Yaron, 2014; Fausto-Sterling, 2000). It is only recently that intersex people have raised their voices against this practice, to the point that the issues now have been taken up by human rights advocates (Agius, 2015). Nonetheless, there is barely any literature on intersex within management studies.

While the prefix *inter-* signals being between or among several entities, *trans-* means to go across or beyond different entities. Consequently, *transgender* and *transsexual* refer to people who cross binary gender borders. They cross, either to go beyond a narrow, binary gender concept or to switch gender/sex. The crossing can take different forms, such as becoming transvestite, transgender, or transsexual.[3] Regardless of whether the transgression of the gender border is temporary or permanent, it challenges the clarity of women and men as a concept. It also muddies the water when it comes to developing measures that benefit a disadvantaged group. One example can be found in the admissions policy of women's colleges in the United States (Nanney & Brunsma, 2017): In 2013, Smith College denied the admission of a trans-woman, which sparked a discussion about how women's colleges define the term w*oman*. Is a woman someone who is defined as such at birth (i.e., is it confined to cis-women?[4] This would restrict gender to biological

sex, which many agreed is too narrow a concept. Then again, the whole concept of a women's college relies on its students being women and sharing this common identity (with the assumption that they also share similar experiences). The question is where to draw the boundary and how to define the group that gains access to support structures. In this specific case, the matter was solved by Smith College adopting a transgender admission policy (Nanney & Brunsma, 2017), yet the overall issue remains contested and debated.

Often, heteronormativity reinstates itself and the binary gender order, be it through explicitly restricting transgender people to the sex that they were assigned to at birth, as in the case of the widely criticized bathroom bill in North Carolina,[5] or through silencing transgender issues (Ozturk & Tatli, 2016; Priola, Lasio, De Simone, & Serri, 2014). Altogether, it appears to be crucial—within the heteronormative framework—to be able to identify people as belonging to either one of two gender groups, as if otherwise they would not be able to be included in the traditional Western concept of being human (Butler, 2004). It is through this mechanism that heteronormativity maintains a binary model of women and men.

Heterosexuality plays a crucial role within heteronormativity, or to put it differently: "heterosexuality is the unstated and unseen foundation on which gender depends" (Pringle, 2008, p. S118). This goes so far as to say that homosexuals sometimes are considered as their own "gender," meaning that lesbians, for example, are sometimes not perceived as women (Butler, 2004). Through heteronormativity, unambiguous gender (indicated through reproductive behavior such as courting/flirting) coincides with a clear sex (reproductive behavior such as gestation). Heteronormativity, therefore, can

> only be understood through attention to what it governs, both gender and sexuality, and how each of these is interwoven with the institutionalization, meaning and practice of heterosexuality and the production of sexual and gendered subjects or selves (Jackson, 2006, p. 109ff.).

Within the heteronormative framework, heterosexuality itself is naturalized; it becomes a compulsory social institution that relies on the binary code "women" and "men" in order to establish legitimate forms of desire (Butler, 1990). Butler (1990) calls this the *heterosexual matrix* to emphasize the interconnectedness of desires, bodies, and gender groups.

There are attempts to break the heteronormative order and queer social spaces, including within business and management. The activist appropriation of the former foul name *queer* emphasizes these efforts. Queer practices aim to break with deeply embedded routines within daily interactions and to fight continuously against the heteronormative sexual order (Butler, 2004; Parker, 2002; Warner, 1991). "Queers do a kind of practical social reflection just in finding ways of being queer" (Warner, 1991, p. 6). Hence, one way to overcome the heteronormative order is to make queer lives and realities

visible—for instance, through research that goes beyond the implicit hegemonic masculine order and its binary sex/gender groups.

Challenging common-sense sex-based differences, as well as showing how gender differences are created through repeated performance and interactions, provide a first step toward developing a more elaborate understanding of the gendered world. However, such perspectives sometimes fail to recognize the actual heterogeneity of individuals as a whole and within the categories of women and men. In the next section, the entanglement of gender with other social categories and processes is expanded on, going beyond the notion of homogenous women or men.

Beyond Gender

With the aim to dismantle the effects of patriarchy, feminist scholars, particularly liberal and radical second-wave feminists (e.g., Calás & Smircich, 2014), focused on bringing women as research objects and subjects into academic discourse. In putting women at the core of research interests, they were often depicted as one homogenous group. It was implicitly assumed that sexism concerns all women in similar ways across the world. This notion of women as a uniform group was strongly criticized as classist, racist, and colonial (Davis, 1983; hooks, 1984; Lorde, 2010; Mohanty, 1988; Combahee River Collective, 2014) because the position put forward was often seen as representative of a privileged subgroup of women.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Black feminist scholars in the United States (as well as minority women in other regions) pointed out that feminist activists and academics often superimposed their own issues on other women. For example, the Combahee River Collective (2014, p. 274) protested against the silencing of Black feminist and rejected the notion that sexism is more prevalent than other forms of oppression:

> We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously.

Nearly 10 years later, Lorde (2010) questioned whether the academic apparatus is at all equipped (or even willing) to deconstruct intertwined forms of oppression. Using her own experience of exclusion as an example of many Black feminist scholars who are pushed to the margins and neglected, she stated that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 2010, p. 27). She demanded that academia tackle racism and homophobia, along with sexism. Similarly, Collins (1989, 2000) called for the establishment of Black feminist thought that not only includes different aspects of life, but also the transnational power hierarchy of the global North and global South. This includes

abandoning Western eurocentrism (Mohanty, 1988). Intersectionality and postcolonial approaches can be considered as two theoretical perspectives that aim to embrace these critiques and overcome their associated epistemological shortcomings.

Intersectionality: The Inseparability of Gender From Other Social Categories

The term *intersectionality* originates from the legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw (1989, 1991), who used the examples of labor lawsuits and violence against women to point out that Black women face different kinds of discrimination than White women or Black men. Her argument is based on a number of legal cases, including *DeGaffenfreid v. General Motors*, in which five Black women sued General Motors after being fired (Crenshaw, 1989). General Motors claimed that they fired the five women due to lack of seniority. However, General Motors did not hire any Black women until a few years prior to the layoffs, meaning that the seniority rule affected all Black women. The court ruled against the plaintiffs, arguing that there was neither discrimination on the grounds of sex nor race, as both White *women* and *Black* men had not been fired. The court looked at both social categories separately and did not recognize the combined effect of race and sex. Despite all Black women losing their jobs, the court did not discern this type of intertwined discrimination. Crenshaw (1989, p. 149) introduced the metaphor of intersection to illustrate the issue:

> Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination.

Intersectionality has gained prominence, and yet its application in research contexts varies extensively (Davis, 2008). Despite conceptual variations, there are some common denominators: intersectional research takes several social categories into consideration and examines their intercategorical and intracategorical relations (Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2005). Moreover, the dynamics associated with these social categories are considered to be intertwined, meaning that they work simultaneously (Holvino, 2010). Instead of scrutinizing potential fault lines that divide teams into different subgroups (Murnighan & Lau, 2017) intersectionality examines the effects of overlapping social dynamics, often through exploring individual subjectivities and identities and their systemic embeddedness (Rodriguez, Holvino, Fletcher, & Nkomo, 2016). Intersectional research aims to unveil power relations that manifest in a person’s privilege or disadvantage, which are not simply additive. Therefore, they cannot be examined in isolation from each other; rather, they must be explored in their entire manifestation (Bowleg, 2008, 2013). Moreover, recommendations have been made to not solely rely on predefined social categories, but rather to examine which markers of difference are influential in a specific

setting (Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012). It is important to bear in mind that some of these markers are invisible at first glance, such as language accent (Johansson & Śliwa, 2016), religion (if not indicated through visible symbols such as wearing a veil, a cross, or a turban), and invisible forms of disability or illness. Moreover, other social categories might have ambivalent meanings, such as age: being perceived as too young or too old poses different obstacles for women and men (Kelan, 2014; Riach, Rumens, & Tyler, 2014). Intersectionality can thus be understood as a way to acknowledge and understand the different positioning that emerges from different social locations and in relation to power dynamics.

Postcolonialism

Gender research has been criticized for neglecting contributions from the global South and imposing the perspective of the global North on all contexts, regardless of the specific setting. Such ethnocentric universalism from European or U.S.-American feminists depicted, for instance, African women as powerless and exploited victims (Mohanty, 1988). This not only puts all African women in one apparently homogenous group and disregards societal differences, it also denies women their own agency and perpetuates a coloniality of knowledge and experience. Due to such epistemic coloniality (Ibarra-Colado, 2006), native elites perceive pressure to align their knowledge production with the concepts and ideology of the global North; i.e., the Anglo-American and Western European way of science production (Bell, Kothiyal, & Willmott, 2017).

Despite the increase of research addressing gender in the global South, the contribution is often restricted to deliver empirical examples within a northern theoretical framework (Connell, 2014, 2015). Epistemic coloniality is particularly prevalent in the construction of theory (Connell, 2015, p. 50):

> The great bulk of feminist writing that circulates internationally and discusses the global South is empirical, descriptive, or policy writing. If there is theory in it—conceptualisation, methodology, or explanatory frameworks—the theory almost always comes from the global North.

To overcome this inequality in knowledge creation, Connell (2014) identifies two key steps. It is important, first, to admit that knowledge on gender is deeply embedded into global hierarchical power relations and, second, to acknowledge that scientists of the global South also produce theoretical contributions that could inform knowledge creation in the global North. Altogether, to decolonize academia, researchers are called upon to go beyond a northern perspective (on gender, among other things) and to adopt theory and knowledge originating in the global South.

Some decolonial approaches criticize the concept of gender itself as colonial. Lugones (2007, 2010) argues that colonizers replaced precolonial gender norms, with colonial violence under the pretext of so-called civilization. The colonizers dehumanized

autochthon people and declined them the status of being human: “colonized people became males and females. Males became not-human-as-not-men, and colonized females became not-human-as-not-women” (Lugones, 2010, p. 744). Within such framing, the colonial female was not considered as a woman. Lugones (2010, p. 746) argues that the coloniality of gender is still effective; “it is what lies at the intersection of gender/class/race as central constructs of the capitalist world system of power.” Consequently, it is important to unveil the overlap of different forms of domination and ask what purpose they serve, without glorifying a precolonial past (Lugones, 2007, 2010; Walsh, 2016).

Thus far, this article has provided an overview of key debates within gender theory. Building on these insights, we now explore how gender theory has been successfully used—or could contribute—to produce new insights into the field of business and management, and more particularly the subfield of organization studies.

Gender in Management

Business and management are not immune to a gendered order, as a growing body of literature shows. In this section, we focus on some of the major theoretical contributions that gender scholars have made to organization theory (for an overview, see also Calás & Smircich, 2006, 2014). First, Acker’s (1990) elaboration of how deeply gender is inscribed in organizational structures and procedures is depicted. Then, the concept of gender subtext (i.e., the hegemonic power relations that maintain a gender binary within organizations) is introduced. Finally, the concept of doing gender while doing organization is outlined. These three approaches show the various ways that gender and organizations are intertwined.

Gendered Organization

In her groundbreaking work, Acker (1990) theorized that gender is not only an individual trait, but also is deeply embedded in organizational structures and procedures. This means that gender cannot be analyzed independent of organizational structures (Acker, 1990, p. 147):

> Organizational logic appears to be gender neutral; gender-neutral theories of bureaucracy and organizations employ and give expression to this logic. However, underlying both academic theories and practical guides for managers is a gendered substructure that is reproduced daily in practical work activities and, somewhat less frequently, in the writings of organizational theorists.

Consequently, organizational theory has to account for the gendered substructures that show in interacting processes (Acker, 1990). These include the construction of divisions along gender differences by creating different job profiles. These divisions are further

reinforced through the construction of supportive images and symbols. Moreover, the interactions between and within different gender groups help to maintain this gendered substructure. In addition, the processes that support the gendered identities of individuals are part of the organizational logic and therefore should be examined together with the materialized logic of organizations, such as working contracts, managerial directives, or job evaluations.

One core feature of the gendered organization is its depiction of workers: “The abstract, bodiless worker, who occupies the abstract, gender-neutral job has no sexuality, no emotions, and does not procreate” (Acker, 1990, p. 151). This so-called ideal worker is the prototypical man, with minimal responsibility outside the work context and whose sexuality and emotions are controlled within the organization. This implicit notion of an ideal worker affects the career paths of women and men within the organization. While jobs are ostensibly defined as abstract and devoid of any human body, the implicit notion on who is best qualified for a job is gendered. Decision-makers draw on these implicit assumptions when they decide whom to hire and promote, resulting in a gendered hierarchy within an organization. This explains why women often encounter “glass ceilings” (Powell & Butterfield, 1994) or a “glass cliff” (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007), while men can ride “glass escalators”(Williams, 1992, 2013). Altogether, Acker (1990, 1992, 2012) demonstrated the manifold ways in which organizational structures and procedures are interwoven with gender.

Gendered Subtext

Gendered processes, such as establishing the ideal worker, are often based on a gendered subtext (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998A, 1998B). The concept of gendered subtext, introduced by Smith (1987), refers to hidden, tacit processes that systematically (re)produce a masculine gender order. The gendered subtexts of organizations include “the opaque, power-based processes that systematically (re)produce the gender distinction via a set of arrangements” (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998A, p. 789). “Text,” in this context, goes beyond the written and spoken word and extends to the symbolic order (re)established through the discourses (Bendl, 2008). It refers to the way that a shared reality is constructed through the inclusion of certain realities and the exclusion of others.

One example of an implicit gendered subtext is the assumption that good managers should be constantly available, meaning they work full time and put in long hours (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998B). Such notion of a manager tacitly conflates a masculine norm of long working hours with an intrinsic job requirement (Durbin & Tomlinson, 2010, 2014). However, full-time availability and long working hours do not necessarily constitute a major feature of good management. Equating constant availability with good management creates an implicit gendered requirement. This way, many women, who work part time or who are unable to work long hours due to caretaking responsibilities,

are tacitly excluded from managerial positions. Women's exclusion passes as legitimate because it is attributed to a conflict of an individual's preferences (for working time) with the supposed nature of management tasks, rather than deriving from the gendered subtext of job requirements and its organizational response (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998B).

Central to the gendered subtext is the distribution of power within an organization, more specifically the hegemonic power processes (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998A, 1998B, 2012). The hegemonic power processes consist of concealed processes that contribute to the formation of meaning. They show themselves in the ways that common sense is expressed and identified with. Hegemonic power processes (re)produce consent with the dominant discourse (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998A). Through interactions within an organization, a shared meaning of what characterizes this organization emerges tacitly. This happens by emphasizing some aspects of reality while marginalizing or excluding others. For instance, organization members who negate the existence of gender discrimination within their organizations, in spite of the fact that women fail to advance equally to senior positions, reinforce the image of a gender-equal workplace (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998B). In sum, the concept of gender subtext raises awareness for the implicit gendered processes that tacitly shape business and management and reinstate a hegemonic masculinity.

Doing Gender While Doing Organization

Doing gender through doing organization adds another perspective to the interplay of gender and organization. While the concept of gendered organization mainly explores how an organization is affected by gender, this approach highlights how gendered and organizational practices cocreate each other. Gender, as a social activity, constitutes a gendered symbolic order of organizations and vice versa. While gendered interactions affect organizations, organizational cultures simultaneously perpetuate the symbolic order of gender through ceremonial and remedial work (Gherardi, 1994, 2014).

Ceremonial work, such as enacting gendered rituals in adressing people with a gendered title, reaffirms the perceived gender. Such ceremonial work can rarely be avoided: "Consider the relational difficulty that arises when we must telephone or write to somebody whose gender we do not know because she or he has an uncommon first name" (Gherardi, 2014, p. 88). The whole courtesy system within an organization, such as who is allowed to speak at what time or who leads and who follows, is hallmarked by an implicit gender logic and (re)establishes gender inequality.

In contrast to ceremonial work, remedial work defers the symbolic gender order. Remedial work consists of the efforts—most often of women—to reduce the harm caused by sexist behavior (Gherardi, 1994, p. 604):

> Within the various forms of sociability in an organization, when both men and women are present, it is very often the task of the women to develop communicative competence in male discourse, to take responsibility for repairing the embarrassment caused by their “diversity,” and to make amends for the intrusiveness of their presence.

For instance, when supposedly sexy posters are on display in hegemonic masculine work settings, women and men who object to such sexist displays (usually of women) have two possible courses of action. The first is to complain and start a fight over such posters. Alternatively, they can adapt their behavior and ignore or even embrace sexist norms. Either way, it is up to the person in the minority position (minority in the sense of less power, not necessarily in numerical terms) to deal with the display of the hegemonic masculine norm. Remedial work can go as far as women experiencing that parts of their gender identity have to take a back seat once they are accepted within a masculine working environment (Gherardi, 1994). Altogether, both remedial work (the partial deferral of the gender symbolic order) and ceremonial work (the ritualistic enactment of this gendered symbolic order) tacitly maintain the gender binary within organizations.

Going Beyond Women and Men in Management Studies

Despite the long-developing debate on the many facets of gender and sex, approaches that address gender in a nondichotomous way are relatively rare in business and management studies. Research that adopts queer, intersectional, or postcolonial approaches are still at the margins. This section addresses conceptual and methodological issues for studies that aim to go beyond narrow concepts of women and men in management studies, as well as to shed further light on the complex, lived realities within organizations. It starts with different ways of conceptualizing the undoing of gender before addressing queer approaches. Subsequently, methodological issues of intersectional research in business and management studies are outlined. Finally, issues that postcolonial gender scholars in management studies tackle are highlighted.

Undoing Gender Within Organizations

Seeing gender as a social practice, one also can assume that gender can be undone. From a theoretical perspective, there are two approaches to undoing gender: ethnomethodological and poststructuralist/discursive (Kelan, 2010). Ethnomethodologically oriented scholars focus on how individuals enact their gender identity in their daily interactions (West & Zimmerman, 1987). From this perspective, gender is a result of actions and would not exist without such gendered interactions. Consequently, if gender was no longer taking center stage in people’s interactions, its salience would diminish.

For instance, a woman leader might reject notions of femininity and cease to reestablish a feminine demeanor and, through this, opt not to reaffirm a feminine gender identity. However, this does not necessarily indicate an undoing of gender. Rather, such coping mechanisms can be seen as an enforcement of masculinity, and hence as a reaffirmation of the masculine order (Gherardi, 1994; Gherardi & Poggio, 2001).

From a poststructuralist/discursive perspective, gender is a performative act. Performativity, as introduced by Butler (1990, 1993), focuses on the social discourse that is cited in the enactment of gender. This enactment is a reiterative practice rather than a single act (Butler, 1993). The citation of a discourse will not live up to its ideal, which creates a scope of agency because individuals can choose how to cite a specific discourse (Butler, 1990). Butler (2004) argues that people can take on transformative positions to challenge the gender norm and question the binary, dichotomous setting of gender and its apparent naturalness. Undoing gender from this perspective, therefore, means deconstructing the binary system of women and men. This way, more than two kinds of gender identity—a pluralization of gender—can emerge (see also the section "QUEER(ING) MANAGEMENT STUDIES"). While the ethnomethodological approach scrutinizes whether gender can remain a crucial aspect of day-to-day interactions, undoing gender in a poststructuralist sense aims to dismantle the binary gender norm (for more on this topic, see Kelan, 2010). Either way, exploring the potential of undoing gender offers insights in how gendering in organizations occurs and could change.

There is only scarce literature published on methodological approaches to examine the undoing of gender. Reviewing the literature on men's practices in doing and undoing gender, Kelan (2017) outlines some methodological issues. Building upon Deutsch's (2007) understanding, doing gender is heightening gender differences, whereas undoing gender is reducing gender differences. One of the key challenges in the field is the complexity required to analyze doing and undoing gender in field settings. Kelan (2017), for instance, points out that searching affirmatively by looking specifically for women can be seen as undoing gender because it establishes gender sameness in the long run, albeit temporarily heightening gender differences. Moreover, Kelan (2017) points out that people themselves might not be aware of their undoing practices, which is why researchers should consider applying an etic reading to situations in which gender is done or undone, which can complement an emic reading of participants themselves.

Researchers, furthermore, are well advised to consider the specific position of the participants within the organization, as "[i]t can be expected that the different levels of the hierarchy will require very different kinds of undoing gender" (Kelan, 2017, p. 12). Insights into the undoing of gender depend upon its specific theoretical conceptualization. Researchers who are aiming to scrutinize the undoing of gender inequality are well advised to consider temporal aspects of gendered practices and the position of their research participants (Kelan, 2017), while researchers who aim to learn more about the undoing of the binary gender construct might consider queer approaches.

Queer(ing) Management Studies

One way to destabilize binaries can be found in queer approaches, which are based on Butler's concept of performativity. The concept of *queer* is not limited to gender or sex (Butler, 2004; Fausto-Sterling, 2000). In its broadest understanding, queer approaches aim to surpass binary, hierarchical, and static concepts in general (Parker, 2002, 2016). *Queering*, therefore, can be seen as a "general term for unsettling complacencies, for making something strange and hence forcing thought" (Parker, 2016, p. 73).

Translating queer theory into methodology and applying it in empirical research pose some challenges. One key aspect of queer theory is that the distinction between social gender and biological sex is not straightforward. Rather, the meaning of the category is constructed in the nexus of body, sex, gender, and sexuality (Butler, 1990). There would be no understanding or significance of sex if not for gender, sexuality, and the body—or vice versa. This emphasizes that such concepts are socially learned and shaped.

However, it is difficult to go beyond the established categories because the nexus of body, sexuality, gender, and sex is so deeply engrained into our way of thinking and being. Yet going beyond the established categories would be one effective way to change the inscribed power relations (Bendl, 2008). For instance, gender research tends to rely on dichotomous terms, the apparently unambiguous groups of "women" and "men." This serves to reify and reinforce the binary social construct of gender. To overcome this dilemma, "we need to understand each category as an open, multiple, heterogeneous, and unstable term that includes its own instabilities" (de Souza, Brewis, & Rumens, 2016, p. 608). This entails an explicit examination of the way that study participants prereflexively perform or transgress heteronormativity in their speech acts, their demeanor, their appearance, and in other ways.

It also means paying attention to who participates in research. If gender is a basic, underlying principle and only women (or only men) take part in a study, then the dichotomy of "women" and "men" is reproduced (de Souza et al., 2016). Consequently, queer approaches aim to invite participants with an open construct of gender that also includes intersex and transgender (see, e.g., Ozturk & Tatli, 2016; Thanem & Wallenberg, 2016). Moreover, the nexus of body, sex, sexuality, and gender is addressed by explicitly asking about gay experiences in the workplace (Rumens & Broomfield, 2014) and addressing the silence around homosexuality and transgender (Priola et al., 2014; Rumens, 2016). Altogether, queer approaches challenge established concepts to open up new, creative, and innovative spaces, both in designing research and in advancing theory.

Intersectionality in Business and Management

Acker (2006) expanded on gendered organizations and introduced the concept of the *inequality regime*, which promoted intersectional perspectives within organization studies. Inequality regimes can be defined as "loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations" (Acker, 2006, p. 443). These inequalities show amid differences in opportunities for promotion, participating in decision-making, and job benefits. Inequality regimes shape organizations on every level, be it in the way that hierarchies are constructed, the way that wages are defined and determined, or how an unequal distribution of power and benefits is legitimized (Acker, 2006, 2009). Moreover, they tend to be fluid, meaning that they can change over time and show up in different ways, depending on the surrounding environment (Acker, 2009).

While Acker focused her work predominantly on class, race, and gender, other categories of difference are also important in organizations. One example is the often-neglected aspect of disability (Metcalfe & Woodhams, 2012). To include further categories in the analysis allows a more accurate accounting of general processes. An example is that of the "glass escalator," which describes the greater ease for men to progress along a career path in feminized work environments (Williams, 1992), and which does not apply in the case of ethnic minority men or men with disabilities (Woodhams, Lupton, & Cowling, 2015). This indicates that intersectionality is more complex than the traditionally employed triad of race-class-gender.

One way of detecting influential social categories is to apply an emic approach (Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012), which means to examine the social categories at play in the way that they emerge in a specific situation, instead of presuming that fixed categories are at play and searching for their effects. Tatli and Özbilgin (2012, p. 187) argue that "identifying and investigating salient categories as emergent enables diversity research to capture the dynamism in the workforce diversity field." Consequently, an emic approach is less likely to miss important social categories that affect organizations.

As these approaches show, one of the main challenges for intersectional research in business and management is how to apply the basic idea of intertwined processes related to social categories in research. To do intersectional research means to deal with complexity, within, among, or even beyond social categories (McCall, 2005). This can be done in a variety of ways (for comprehensive overviews, see Mooney, 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2016). Mooney (2016) thus calls for a "nimble" approach to intersectionality, arguing that once researchers ascertain that their research is indeed intersectional, they should ask at what level intersectionality is addressed. Work that examines the interplay of intersectional identities and career opportunities will ask for a different approach if this interplay is addressed from an individual or an organizational perspective. Moreover, researchers should be clear about the specific research subject. A different method is required if societal power processes and their impact on business and management are discussed, or if group dynamics are the focus. Also, the overall epistemological and ontological approaches have an impact. If social categories are considered as dynamic

rather than static, then quantitative methods are more challenging than qualitative ones. Aside from these methodological issues, intersectional research requires a good, theoretically guided interpretation that embeds the results within the intersectional framework (Bowleg, 2008). Altogether, intersectional research is multifaceted and aims to capture the complexity of social life with different methods that are suited for the specific research question.

Postcolonial Approaches to Gender in Management

Within management studies, postcolonial approaches that also address gender are scarce. The epistemic coloniality of management studies in general has been criticized, pointing toward an imbalance in management and organization studies, especially regarding the research and theory work from the global South (Calás & Smircich, 2006; Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Nkomo, 2011; Yousfi, 2014). This work, however, refers only marginally to gender.

Postcolonial gender research addresses issues such as the colonial construction of the gendered “Other” within business and management, such as for Muslim women (Bilge, 2010; Essers & Tedmanson, 2014; Golnaraghi & Mills, 2013) or women in the Middle East (Metcalfe, 2006; Mostafa, 2005). The colonial construction of the gendered “Other” is one postfeminist strategy to relegate gender issues into another location or culture (Gill, Kelan, & Scharff, 2017). Stereotypical remarks, such as “No, we do not have an issue with sexism, but within Muslim societies, women are discriminated against,” not only homogenize all Muslim women and the societies they live in, but construct Muslim women as oppressed and in need of “saving” (Golnaraghi & Mills, 2013). This can affect Muslim women, as they have to make an extra effort to overcome multiple processes of exclusion.

Research on Muslim women entrepreneurs shows that these women counter multiple processes of exclusion through the creation of new identity spaces and using varying strategies (Essers & Tedmanson, 2014; Humbert & Essers, 2012). One possible strategy is to create an explicit transnational identity and create transnational spaces (Humbert & Essers, 2012; Pio & Essers, 2014). Transnational spaces are not bound to states or national borders, but rather signify peoples transcending and blurring such boundaries. Transnational, postcolonial feminism and research based on this epistemology, therefore, examines asymmetrical power relations, destabilizes binaries and recognizes situatedness (Pio & Essers, 2014). Altogether, there is still more work to be done to decolonize management studies. The way forward would be to critically examine the way that the “Other” is constructed and to take up the work done by scholars from the global South.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to show that gender research is more than just adding sex as a variable in a study. Instead, gender needs to be recognized as deeply inscribed in business and management processes. This means that gender is an implicit part of work and organization. To conduct gender research, therefore, requires challenging gender (and sex) as natural and unveiling gender stereotypes as social constructs. Moreover, gender research is not limited to studies on women. The position of men in relation to gender also needs to be considered. This includes paying attention to hegemonic masculinity—that is, the power relations that establish a gender hierarchy, which privileges a specific type of masculinity.

Furthermore, gender is not detached from sexed bodies or sexuality; rather it is embedded in a heteronormative frame. Heteronormativity appears in the pressure to construct an unambiguous, binary gender identity. Another consequence of heteronormative pressure is the silencing of homosexuality, as well as intersex, transgender, or queer realities. While queer scholars deconstruct the binary gender, intersectional and postcolonial approaches focus on the entanglement of gender with other forms of domination and power. Intersectional research addresses the intertwined, simultaneous effects of social categories such as gender, race, class, age, disability, religion, or sexuality. Postcolonial approaches criticize the epistemic coloniality of academia, which results in neglecting knowledge from the global South and mistake a Western perception of gender (among other concepts) as universally valid.

Well-grounded gender theory allows more nuanced empirical insights into the complexity of social life within business and management. A postcolonial gender perspective, moreover, facilitates the recognition of neglected knowledge and expertise. Gender theory also informs the overall concept of organizations. The concept of inequality regimes, for instance, demonstrates in what ways organizational procedures, structures, and cultures are intertwined with gender and other forms of inequalities.

To live up to the promises of gender theory, researchers need to avoid reification and try to go beyond a binary, static conception of women and men. They have to look beyond the ostensible nature of each sex category and take the manifold display of sex and gender into account. Moreover, it is important to be aware of the power relations within research, be it one’s own academic discipline or between the researcher and the research subject. How research is designed, what epistemological basis is used to formulate a research question, which research participants are invited, how data is analyzed, which questions are posed on the material, and which conclusions are drawn—all of this shapes meaningful research on gender and needs to be informed by current gender theory to make inequalities and power relations visible.

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Notes:

(1.) Assuming that the approximate time for each pregnancy is about 9 months, and adding 6 months for lactation as per the WHO's recommendations, although in practice there are wide recommendations and many debates around whether evidence supports exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months (Kramer & Kakuma, 2002), means that women on average in the world spend approximately 15 months on sex-specific reproductive activities per child. According to the World Development Indicators for 2014 (World Bank, 2014), the number of births per woman averaged 2.5 in the world (ranging from 1.2 in the Republic of Korea to 7.6 in Niger). This means that on average, women in the world spend 37.5 months on reproductive activities, or just over 3 years of their lives. Considering that the average life expectancy at birth stands at nearly 74 years on average (World Bank, 2014), female-specific reproductive activities account for only about 4% of their lives. Reversing this number shows that women are actually not affected by female-specific reproduction for 96% of their lives.

(2.) This includes all forms of divergence, such as different chromosome compositions, androgen insensitivity, and vaginal or penile agenesisamong. Not all those so-called deviations led to surgeries. The number of surgeries to establish an unambiguous sex is estimated as up to 0.2% (Blackless et al., 2000).

(3.) In general, the term *transvestites* refers to people who like to express their own identity as different from the stereotypical gender role they are assigned; some people like to fully cross-dress (e.g., men dressing as women or women dressing as men) or use gender-atypical character expressions, such as men applying nail polish. The term *transsexual* refers to people who underwent or undergo a medical procedure, such as hormone therapy and surgery, to change the sex that they were born with to another. The term *transgender* is, in general, applied to people who take on another gender role than the one they were assigned. Some people refer to the latter also as *gender queer*, if it goes beyond a binary gender concept. Individuals may switch among these labels; hence, the association is more fluid than fixed (Thanem & Wallenberg, 2016).

(4.) The prefix *cis-* indicates that one lives and identifies with the gender and sex that one was assigned at birth.

(5.) Available online.

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