Routledge with Isabel Crowhurst and Laurie James-Hawkins, Difficult Conversations: A feminist dialogue.

SECTION 4 CHAPTER 13

LOST FOR WORDS: DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS ABOUT ETHICS, REFLEXIVITY, AND RESEARCH GOVERNANCE

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Abstract:

This chapter focuses on some of the difficult conversations that arise during the academic research process. It takes the form of a dialogue between the principal researcher, her (male) partner and her (female) research supervisor reflecting on the heteronormative assumptions that appeared to underpin and play out in conversations about research governance, specifically the conditions of possibility associated with institutional ethical approval. The research, discussed here as a case study, consisted of an auto-ethnography of lap dancing clubs in the South East of England. It involved undertaking observational research in lap dancing clubs, for which the University recommended that the female researcher's male partner accompanied her in a chaperoning capacity, implicitly making it a condition of institutional approval. It was even suggested at the time that this might be a 'perk' for him. The conversations that took place during this period and subsequently left those involved, for different reasons, lost for words in so far as we found our discomfort difficult to articulate and act on. Here, we reflect on this experience as co-authors, individually and collaboratively, in order to share some thoughts on how these assumptions and practices might be avoided in future. The chapter begins with a brief outline of the case study, and of the governance mechanisms involved, working through the three authors' recollections and reflections of the ethical approval process that took place. We then draw from specific phases of Judith Butler's writing on gender, subjectivity and ethics to consider, respectively, three parallel 'difficult' conversations through which this process was shaped. First, we draw from Butler's (1990/2000) early work on the heterosexual matrix in order to reflect on some of the ontological issues raised, relating particularly to who we were/are as researchers, and to the gendered subjectivities that were 'hailed' into being through the research governance process we consider. Second, we reflect on epistemological issues raised by questions of whose knowledge and expertise was recognized with reference to Butler's (1997) work on the relationship between language and subject formation. Finally, we reflect on methodological concerns relating to how reflexivity and ethics were negotiated, drawing on insights from Butler's (2016, 2020) more recent writing on vulnerability and/as resistance. Reflecting on these three parallel sets of conversations enables us to consider how gender inequalities were reinforced through the implicit lack of reflexivity in the governance process we discuss. In conclusion, we emphasize the importance and challenges associated with

embodied ethics, reflexivity and 'speaking out' about the kinds of difficulties we encountered as part of a more dialogical approach to research governance, and in academic discussions more widely.

This chapter focuses on some of the difficult conversations that arise during the academic research process. It takes the form of a dialogue between the principal researcher (Sophie), her (male) partner (Paul) and her (female) research supervisor (Melissa) reflecting on the heteronormative assumptions that appeared to underpin and play out in conversations about research governance, specifically the conditions of possibility attached to institutional ethical approval[1]. The approach that we take draws inspiration from Crowhurst and Kennedy-Macfoy (2013) in thinking about research gatekeepers, and gatekeeping as a theoretical problem rather than simply a practical one. The research, discussed here as a case study, consisted of an auto-ethnography of lap dancing clubs based in the South-East of England. It involved undertaking observational research in lap dancing clubs, for which the University recommended that the female researcher's male partner accompanied her in a chaperoning capacity, implicitly making this a condition of institutional approval. It was even suggested at the time that this might be a 'perk' for him. The conversations that took place during this period and subsequently left those involved, for different reasons, lost for words in so far as we found our discomfort difficult to articulate and act on. Here, we reflect on this experience as co-authors, individually and collaboratively, in order to share some thoughts on how these assumptions and practices might be avoided in future.

The chapter begins with a brief outline of the case study, and of the governance mechanisms involved, working through the three authors' recollections and reflections of the ethical approval process that took place. We then draw from specific phases of Judith Butler's writing on gender, subjectivity, and ethics to consider, respectively, three parallel 'difficult' conversations through which this process was shaped. First, we draw from Butler's (1990/2000) early work on the heterosexual matrix in order to reflect on some of the ontological issues raised, relating particularly to who we were/are as researchers, and to the gendered subjectivities that were 'hailed' into being through the research governance process we consider. Second, we reflect on epistemological issues raised by questions of whose knowledge and expertise was recognized with reference to Butler's (1997) work on the relationship between language and subject formation. Finally, we discuss methodological concerns relating to how reflexivity and ethics were negotiated, drawing on insights from Butler's (2016, 2020) more recent writing on vulnerability and/as resistance.

Reflecting on these three parallel sets of conversations enables us to consider how gender inequalities were reinforced through the implicit lack of reflexivity in the governance process we discuss, and to consider how the implicit lack of reflexivity in research governance effectively rendered the ethical approval process unethical. In conclusion, we emphasize the importance and challenges associated with embodied ethics, reflexivity and

'speaking out' about the kinds of difficulties we encountered as part of a more dialogical approach to research governance, and in academic discussions more widely.

Situating research ethics and governance

We begin by reflecting (separately and then in dialogue) on the heteronormative assumptions that appeared to underpin and play out in the process of securing institutional ethical approval for an auto-ethnographic, doctoral study. The research, discussed here as a case study, consisted of an auto-ethnography of lap dancing clubs based in the South-East of England. Before we begin, we would like to situate these reflections in relevant dialogues and insights in academic discussions about research governance and ethics.

First, in organisational research we often encounter unreflexive assumptions about gender, particularly when researching sexualized and embodied forms of work. Tyler (2020) notes for example that the Soho based sex shop workers she interviewed were often assumed by their friends and family to have the 'best job in the world' as they were surrounded by pornography all day. As academic researchers not only do we study and write about these kinds of unreflexive, gendered assumptions, we also experience them ourselves, as we discuss here. Therefore, there is a need to consider how research, particularly embodied research, can be undertaken more reflexively.

Second, research has highlighted the different ways people embody aspects of their identity such as age, class, gender, and sexuality in and through work, yet there are relatively few accounts of how researchers embody their identity in the context of research design and practice, particularly their experiences of research governance. Emphasizing the embodied nature of academic work, Harding et al (2021: 2) note how 'we work ideas through our bodies; we write through our bodies, hoping to get into the bodies of our readers, and our academic bodies are on display while we teach'; our bodies are also the way in which we encounter one another, and embed ourselves in, the academic research process, yet this is largely 'written out' of the administration and regulation of what we research, why we do so, and how, constraining what is seen as legitimate scholarship, and who is regarded as a credible researcher.

Feminist writers such as Iris Marion Young (2005) have argued that the normative expectations governing recognition of gender identities and performances mean that women and girls learn to inhabit and experience their bodies in ways that accentuate bodily constraint, undermining agentic capacity. In the academic sphere, gendered expectations have been written about particularly in co-authoring relationships in which the man is expected to have done the intellectual 'heavy lifting' in support of the woman co-author. Such assumptions, Brewis (2005) argues, mean that when men and women co-author, a presumption might be made that the man makes a greater intellectual contribution than the woman.

Notably, Brewis (2005) has shared her experience of being 'signed' in particular ways because of her research on sex work, recounting her experience of assumptions being made about her working history, namely that if you research sex work you must have some experience of the type of work you write about. Brewis goes on to state how sex work research is treated differently by the academy and is 'particularly likely to be subject to signings by others' (Brewis, 2005: 496)[2]. Brewis emphasizes that people often assume that she has worked in the sex industry in the roles that she studied (namely sex work), making the presumption that her work is autoethnographic. Drawing on and developing insights from Brewis, our discussion here reflects on the assumptions shaping research on the sex industry when the study is known to be autoethnographic, considering how that institutional knowledge shaped research governance. Further, while Brewis explored her experiences at an individual level, focusing on self-reflection, we explore how heteronormative assumptions were embedded in institutional practices and procedures, and in the difficult and ongoing conversations between us.

Third, scholarship relating to research ethics in embodied research tends to focus on how research may encroach on the personal lives of participants and how the researcher/participant relationship can be negotiated as ethically as possible. While these insights are no doubt a crucial aspect of ethical practice, the researcher and participant are not the only research stakeholders, so further exploration of the positioning and experiences of broader stakeholders is important in understanding the wider ethical implications of embodied research and how gender and other hierarchies relate to processes of research governance in the wider context of the situated self. We might suggest that this is especially the case in situations in which co-researchers and other stakeholders are 'intimate others' (Ellis, 2007), as was the case in the research we discuss here. In this sense, the chapter also responds to calls for 'continued deliberation and innovation – in particular, deliberation over the ontological relation between self (as researcher) and Other (as researched)' (Rhodes, 2009: 665, see also Rhodes, 2019), extending this call to encompass the need for reflexive dialogue about the relationship between all stakeholders in the research process, including of the power relations within which they are situated.

Finally, there is a persistent tendency for academic publications to provide 'cleaned up' accounts of research and academic writing for publication (Bell and Willmott, 2020; Pullen and Rhodes, 2008; Thanem and Knights, 2019). As Gilmore et al (2019: 3) have emphasized, this reproduces intellectual norms that are restrictive, and which 'inhibit the development of knowledge and excise much of what it is to be human from our learning, teaching and research'. Released from these restrictions, they argue, it might be possible to 'invoke new political and ethical practices'. With this in mind, our aim here is to share an account of what we feel went wrong during our experiences of the institutional research governance process with the intention that doing so will provide valuable, reflexive insight into

gendered assumptions embedded in the research process, and on the ethical implications of undertaking research unreflexively.

Our reflections lead us to develop the argument that unreflexive research is unethical and that embodied reflexivity is vital to the research process. With that in mind, we make three suggestions for conducting gender reflexive research, that together constitute the approach that we would adopt if we were to do the research discussed here again. First, gender reflexive research needs to identify gendered assumptions and their impact on and throughout the research process. Our experiences suggested that these assumptions should be reflected on in-situ, incrementally as a cumulative process and in-dialogue, in our case, between researchers. Second, research should be anti-hierarchical to avoid positioning researchers as vulnerable or protective merely based on gender; third, and connected to this, is the importance of adopting an anti-essentialist approach to the research to avoid bifurcation of researchers into simplistic, binary categories of male and female, masculine and feminine, knowing/expert or not, that lend credence to the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 2000) rather than challenge it. The latter, we argue, has important epistemological implications for whose knowledge and expertise are recognized, and in what respect.

Case study: An autoethnography of the lap dancing industry

The lap dancing industry is situated in what can be thought of as a grey area between sex work and sexualized labour (Bott, 2006; Hales et al, 2019; Lister, 2015), where the latter may be consumed as part of a wider service experience but is not the only, or even main, object of commercial exchange. As such, it is a particularly apposite context within which to consider the gendered dynamics of the research process as women who work in sectors or settings associated with commercial sex are typically 'ubiquitous yet also somehow out of place' (Tyler, 2020: 166). In other words, while women are the main providers of the labour that is studied, the wider setting of the club and the industry itself are almost exclusively male dominated, with most customers, managers and owners being men (Colosi, 2020). The focus of our discussion of this case study is on what this means, being somehow 'ubiquitous' yet also 'out of place' for lived, embodied experiences of the research process, in particular of research governance, within these kinds of settings but also more widely.

Lap dancing is a commission-based sales role within a night club environment where typically men can buy striptease dances from workers who are typically young adult women. The work itself consists of dancers interacting with customers with the purpose of trying to sell lap dances or so called 'sit-downs' (both of which form the paid work and usually happen in private areas of the club), at other times dancers are expected to perform pole dances on stage. This is usually an unpaid aspect of the work[3] that takes place in the main club area, in view of all customers and is intended to provide a means for dancers to promote themselves and build rapport with customers, often through the use of eye

contact to build a more personal connection between dancer and (potential) customer. Because dancers don't get paid for stage performances, the interactions with customers during this time are very much focused on nurturing a relationship that will lead to a monetary transaction.

The case study itself focused on the lived, embodied, experiences of women working in the lap dancing industry to understand more about how and why specific modes of sexuality become valued and how the portrayal of a specific, narrow, and heightened form of sexuality is performed, embodied and negotiated as dancers age (Hales et al, 2019, 2021). The research took the form of a retrospective autoethnography because Sophie had worked as a lap dancer for four years, beginning when she was aged 18, some five years prior to the start of the project. The study incorporated three phases of data collection including a website analysis, participant observation and interviews with women working as lap dancers. It should be noted that during data collection phases, the observations were conducted in the guise of club customers. Given that Sophie had accumulated several years' experience of working as a dancer, she thought that participating in the industry with a different role would add depth and a different perspective to her insider knowledge, with her 'new' academic positioning and the passing of five years since she had worked in the industry (at the start of her PhD) providing some invaluable opportunities to reflexively occupy an 'insider/outsider' role.

The fieldwork took place over a period of twelve months during which the website analysis, observations and interviews took place. 32 hours of observations were undertaken in nine lap dancing clubs situated in the South-East of England, all located within easy travelling distance from home for Sophie and enabling her to make use of her existing contacts for snowball sampling purposes. The focus of the fieldwork was on gathering embodied data and a lot of time was spent considering how to tap into dancers' embodied accounts of their work and, during observations, how Sophie would focus on the ways that dancers embody the role of a lap dancer as they inhabit and negotiate the lap dancing club environment.

As is the norm in a University setting, and in accordance with funding council best practice guidelines, institutional ethical approval was required before the project could proceed. In this instance, this involved completing a written application for ethical approval that was considered initially by the relevant departmental Ethics Officer. Given the nature of the setting and the methods proposed, including covert participant observation in lap dancing clubs, the application was referred, in accordance with institutional guidelines, to a University level Ethics Committee for consideration. Feedback from this Committee, communicated informally by the departmental Ethics Officer, forms the basis of our reflections below, and required amendments to the research design that we consider.

Negotiating ethical approval

Sophie: I was apprehensive about the ethical approval process and aware that gaining approval for researching a sexualized field was likely to be more complex than if I had been studying a more mainstream industry and even more so because I was hoping to do covert observations in the research setting and would have to provide a robust ethical justification for doing so.

It quickly became apparent that alongside the proposed covert observations, the marginalized 'grey' area of the lap dancing industry and, specifically, my safety within it was at the forefront of the negotiations for ethical approval. This was understandable given the position of lap dancing in the night-time economy, in the shadows of the sex industry (Sanders, 2008) and with a presumed closeness to prostitution[4]. However, an important reason for doing this research was because I was familiar with the industry and had access to it. So, when the Ethics Officer told one of my supervisors (Melissa) that because it was 'a bit of a dodgy environment' I would need to be chaperoned during observational fieldwork, I felt while this was understandable, I had also been re-positioned in a way that minimised my knowledge and expertise of the industry and in some way, the institution had 'cleaned me up' by distancing me from my ex-lap dancer identity. Taking this step was interesting given that my familiarity with that setting would likely be greater than any of my potential chaperones, yet at the time, it also seemed understandable as the fieldwork would involve moving around city centre settings at night.

Specifically, the conditions for doing fieldwork were as follows: for me to be accompanied by someone at all observations who was close enough to me to have my best interests at heart, preferably a family member. While this seemingly provides me with a range of options for chaperones, the choice was largely illusory once those whom I would be uncomfortable with in that setting were discounted, for example parents and siblings. The most obvious option was my partner, Paul, so as long as I could convince him to give up his time then I could go ahead with my fieldwork.

Paul agreed to help out; when we discussed my research in social settings, however, he encountered comments about him enjoying being able to participate in the fieldwork, seemingly underpinned by the assumption that we would be happy about being in this position. Yet the reality was quite different. While Paul had agreed quite quickly to assist me, by accompanying me during the observational sessions in lap dancing clubs, little thought had seemingly been given to how he would actually feel about this, or to what the practicalities of his involvement would be. Accompanying me on a Saturday night once a month is one thing but gathering ethnographic data across a spread of weekly night shifts in lap dancing clubs after having worked long days himself is quite another. It wasn't long

before I felt very guilty about asking him to come out for a night, especially when I knew he would rather be at home (despite the perception of some of our friends).

In discussions about ethical governance with my supervisor (Melissa), with the departmental ethics officer and with relevant academics at the University, the whole focus seemed to be on protecting me as a student researcher and in adopting this focus, assumptions were made that Paul would be both comfortable being there (even think it was a 'perk' in the case of the female ethics officer) and protective of me in that environment. At the time, my concern was to get the research underway, but with hindsight, the focus of these discussions was on my relative vulnerability as a researcher and on his capacity to provide paternalistic protection as my (male) chaperone. Added to this was the presumption, beyond the institutional governance process, of the pleasure he might derive from being in this particular setting. Quite quickly I could sense his discomfort as we spent time in lap dancing clubs; notably, this contrasted with my own sense of familiarity with the environment and the work involved. Unlike my male partner, I found myself feeling quite quickly 'at home' in the clubs I was studying.

Melissa: We always expected Sophie's application for ethical approval to be referred to a University-level committee, but with hindsight I'm not sure why we made this assumption. The referral, the way it was articulated and communicated (as being because the project and setting were 'a bit dodgy'), and the conditions that were subsequently attached to ethical approval had important consequences for Sophie, and for the research project. First, I recall how it accentuated Sophie's anxiety about presenting the research in academic contexts, causing her (in my perception, anyway), to doubt her own academic abilities and the credibility of the project. In the months and years that followed, I felt my role was to be supportive when Sophie seemed to avoid explaining that the project was auto-ethnographic and played down her own 'insider' knowledge and its value to and for the project. As her supervisor, what I should have done was embraced that discussion as a 'sticky moment' (Riach, 2009) in the research process, encouraging critical reflexivity. It struck me at the time, being with Sophie during presentations and listening to her feedback from those that I hadn't attended (e.g. conferences) that there was a very embodied dimension to the institutional scrutiny of Sophie's research (and by implication, of Sophie), one that was highly gendered, but also implicitly class and age based. Second, I also failed to critically reflect on the assumption that, because the observational research would take place in clubs that were often located on the outskirts of city centres, in relatively quiet areas that Sophie would be leaving in the early hours of the morning, that she would be vulnerable, and that having a (male) chaperone with her would keep her safe. At the time, we barely spoke about the implications of being positioned in this way not just for Sophie, but also for her (male) partner, Paul.

Paul: When I was asked by Sophie to accompany her during her fieldwork, I was intrigued both personally and professionally. At the time I was working as a couple's therapist and had an interest in erotic activities within relationships, instilling an inquisitive fascination with the idea of going to these kinds of clubs.

I was interested in the covert nature of the fieldwork setting, and in how I might be perceived by the dancers in this context. And I was acutely aware that my social position was altered by the intention of my visit, mainly by creating a shift away from the archetypically male bonding activity of going to strip clubs for pleasure and my current visit with my (female) partner whereby I was entering the same venue in a quasi-professional, albeit undercover research capacity. Leaving me feeling somewhat on edge this contrasted, in my mind at least, with the presumption that a man would feel comfortable inhabiting this kind of environment, perhaps anticipating it with excitement rather than the sense of dread that I experienced.

This sense of being 'on edge' was also accentuated by the extent to which I was curious to see how the dancers would perceive us as a hetero couple. My own experiences of this type of establishment previously, while minimal, had been with groups of men on homosocial and 'macho' style male outings. This is an interesting juxtaposition because typically in this context pleasure is assumed to be gained by a man watching the sexualised female performances, but in this case, I was intrigued about being watched by the dancers and by wondering about how they perceived my partner and I, and our relationship.

In many ways, however, I also felt forced into the strip club environment, as this is not a night-time economy that I would usually choose to engage in. Reflecting on the discomfort I had experienced on previous occasions with friends, as well as my growing sense of edginess in anticipation of further visits as a chaperone, I feel that Sophie inadvertently placed me into a rather problematic position, where I felt obliged to accompany her. Fulfilling the conditions set out by the institutional ethical approval process led me to experience a feeling of restricted autonomy, because my refusal may have been seen as both unhelpful and unsupportive in the context of our personal relationship. On reflection, this placed me – and our relationship - in an untenable position as I could have jeopardized not only the research but also potentially the sense of trust and mutual support between us.

Yet the approval process to which Sophie had to conform seemed to position me within a hegemonically heteronormative set of assumptions that presumed that, as a heterosexual man, I would inevitably enjoy accompanying Sophie to a strip club, or at least that I would be happy to do so and would see this as within the remit of my role as her (male) partner. Perhaps it is somewhat unsurprising that I was viewed in this way by the institution given the reaction from several of my peers. They positioned my role in the fieldwork as akin to 'winning the lottery', as one of them put it, by being offered an opportunity to visit several

strip clubs. I saw this as a ‘work’ commitment, however, one that I felt compelled to undertake in order to support my partner’s academic research. Again, perhaps ironically, this set of assumptions made me question my own masculine identity and notice that I often hold or at least publicly express significantly different attitudes to that of several of my contemporaries. This sense of discomfort has led me to question my legitimacy within particular social groups, including all-male social groups.

Sophie, Melissa, and Paul: Looking back on the different experiences and recollections described above leads us to re-think the institutional ethical approval process, bringing to the fore aspects of our own positioning and practice that, for various reasons, we retired at the time. Heavily gendered assumptions were made that a man (in this case, Paul) could, and would, need to protect a woman (Sophie) from her position of relative vulnerability. This had significant implications for the researcher, for the research, and for wider stakeholders that we have reflected on so far. To make sense of these, we now turn to insights from Judith Butler’s writing on the heterosexual matrix, subjectivity, and ethics to consider, respectively, three parallel ‘difficult’ conversations through which the experiences discussed above were shaped.

Discussion: heteronormativity, knowledge and vulnerability in dialogue

Research governance within the heterosexual matrix

Although she has moved away from the term in her more recent thinking, Butler’s (1990/2000) early work on the heterosexual matrix persists as an important backdrop to her more recent writing, and to critical analyses of gendered governance within organizational settings. In order to reflect on some of the ontological issues raised above, relating particularly to who we were/are as researchers, and to the gendered subjectivities that were ‘hailed’ into being through the gendered assumptions and norms governing research we have considered here, we draw from this idea to reflect on our respective positioning according to the terms of the heterosexual matrix.

Butler writes about the heterosexual matrix as an ontological, epistemic schema through which a normative – binary, hierarchical and linear – relationship between sex, gender and sexuality is sustained[5]. The heterosexual matrix is effectively an organization of ontology – a structured, sense-making process that serves to compel and constrain particular ways of being, conferring or denying recognition, and allocating access to rights, responsibilities, and resources accordingly (Tyler, 2020); it is the mechanism through which ‘the *organization* of gender comes to function as a presupposition about how the world is structured’ (Butler, 2004: 215, *emphasis added*). According to the terms of this matrix, intelligible and therefore recognizable and liveable genders are those which cohere a continuous, even causal relationship between sex, gender, and sexual desire; this relationship and its normalizing effects, Butler maintains, are not natural or pre-social but have the constitutive *effect* of

being so. The matrices of cultural intelligibility that shape social (and institutional) life therefore govern gender as a 'performative accomplishment' (Butler, 2000: 179) by compelling certain subjectivities (those that conform to normative expectations), at the same time as foreclosing others.

In the experiences discussed above we each, in different but related ways, found ourselves situated within the binary, hierarchical terms of the heterosexual matrix as part of the research governance process in at least three ways. First, the protective paternalism articulated within the ethical approval process positioned Sophie and Paul as embodying, respectively, the need for protection and the capacity to provide it. Second, heteronormative assumptions were articulated explicitly by his friends/associates and implicitly/more informally, through the presumption that Paul would enjoy accompanying Sophie to lap dancing clubs, even that it would be a 'perk' for him to do so. Finally, in doing so, Sophie's embodied, experiential knowledge and expertise were disregarded, or 'written out' of the ethical approval process as part of the way in which her subjectivity as a researcher was framed.

Hailing the research subject

Our final point above raises epistemological concerns about whose knowledge and expertise was recognized. We discuss these with reference to Butler's (1997) work on the relationship between language and subject formation. Amongst a wide range of intellectual influences, Butler's performative theory of gender draws heavily on the concept of interpellation as it is developed in Louis Althusser's (2001) discussion of the ideological processes through which particular subject positions are 'hailed' into being, a concept she refers to throughout much of her work (see Butler, 2016). For Althusser, it is through the process of hailing (being beckoned into a response) that individuals become 'interpellated' into subject positions that are continually re-enacted. To illustrate this process, Althusser makes reference to a police officer commanding, 'Hey! You there!'. In the combined act of calling out, acknowledging, and responding, the police officer and the person being hailed effect the latter as a 'suspect', someone who is required to account for him- or herself (e.g. their actions or presence). Through this process, even fleetingly, a particular subject position is taken up.

The same interpellatory process can be identified in the proclamation: 'It's a girl/boy,' when a baby is born. Butler argues that the presumption of subject positions such as these serve to perpetuate the idea that the division of humanity into two sexes is somehow normal and natural; rather, she argues, it is the outcome of a social process of interpellation through which gendered subject positions are performatively, continually re-enacted. These performative re-enactments and recitations give the impression that something socially constructed is pre-social or essential. Illustrative examples of such performative enactments include the sex-based classification of competitors by sports committees, or inter-sex babies being routinely 'sexed' at birth or shortly afterwards. It is not simply this process that is of

concern to Butler, but the normative conditions or governmental regimes compelling or constraining it.

To reiterate, for Butler, gender performativity is driven largely by the desire for recognition of ourselves as viable, intelligible subjects. In other words, underpinning our performance of gender and other aspects of our identities is the desire to project a coherent and compelling identity, one that is recognized and valorized by others, but one that in Butler's terms, produces its coherence at the cost of its own complexity. In *Giving an Account of Oneself* Butler (2005) considers how this relates to the self as a narrative composition, considering the ways in which our existential vulnerability, socially and economically induced precarity and subjection to processes that 'undo' us require us to cohere a version of ourselves designed to elicit recognition, and to secure the rights and opportunities that recognition of one's social (and organizational viability) potentially brings. Here 'accounting' for oneself involves not simply telling a story about oneself but providing a convincing ethical defence of one's claim to recognition. Butler's (2005) view of narrative, developed most fully in her discussion of how and why the self is continually called to 'account', provides a performative lens through which to understand how narratives operate in the process of becoming a subject, including within and through research processes (Riach et al., 2014, 2016).

In particular, Butler's largely phenomenological understanding locates narrative, as an attempt to cohere and convey a liveable life, within the context of the desire for recognition of oneself as a viable subject; as she puts it: 'I come into being as a reflexive subject only in the context of establishing a narrative account of myself' (Butler, 2005: 15). Framed in this way, narrative is not simply telling one's life story, but rather the response we are compelled to provide when being 'held to account' for ourselves (Butler, 2005: 12), or are 'hailed' in Althusser's terms.

As we reflect on our respective, and collaborative, complicity in the way in which we were each positioned within the research governance process discussed here, we are reminded of how, in situ, our sense of responsibility to progress the research, and of our identification with it, rendered us vulnerable to complying with the terms of recognition on offer. We did not, at the time or since, formally challenge the decision taken by the School ethical officer, or the University Ethics Committee, nor did we question the way in which this decision was articulated or rationalized. It is only as the research process unfolded, over a period of some four years, and as we worked independently and collaboratively, on subsequent presentations and publications that we have come to position ourselves differently – to question the subject positions into which we were hailed, and on what basis. Not least, our concern is with the epistemic hierarchies that were played out in the process of securing ethical approval and with the consequences of these for relations of meaningful, knowing consent within the research process.

Vulnerability in/as resistance in research governance
With our final point in mind, we discuss our methodological concerns relating to how reflexivity and ethics were embedded into the research process, drawing on insights from Butler's (2016, 2020) more recent writing on vulnerability and/as resistance. In some of her most recent work on ethics, Butler shows us how the paternalistic forms of power to which those designated as 'vulnerable' and in need of protection are subject shores up their disenfranchisement (Butler, 2016, 2020), further paving the way for the epistemic violence enacted by those who – however well intentioned - claim to 'know better'. But she also reminds us how those who are excluded from the locus of ontological and/or epistemic privilege haunt the borders of subjective viability, and in doing so, she offers us a way into a rich understanding of how powerful processes and practices permeate the organizational lifeworlds we inhabit, enabling us to interrogate our vulnerability to these, critically and reflexively.

In Butler's frame of reference, embodied ethics broadly refers to the idea that the basis of our ethical relationship to one another is our embodied inter-connection and the mutual, corporeal vulnerability that arises from this. Recognition of the organizational potential and implications of this ethical relationship has been a strong theme in writing about research ethics and reflexive practice as situated, embodied and relational. Recognition of mutual vulnerability as the basis of an ethical and reflexive approach to research governance strikes us as being quite distinct from the hierarchical, bifurcated process we experienced. It is one that encourages us to think about alternative ways of understanding and enacting the ethical approval process in ways premised upon a questioning of assumptions, a dismantling of hierarchies, and a recognition of all ways of knowing – including (but not limited to) those that are embodied and experiential.

Concluding thoughts: Embodied ethics, reflexivity, and the challenges of speaking out

Reflecting on these three parallel sets of conversations above enables us to consider how gender and other class-based inequalities were reinforced through the implicit lack of reflexivity in the governance process we discuss, and to consider how this absence effectively rendered the ethical approval process unethical. In conclusion, we would like to emphasize the importance of 'speaking out' collaboratively and reflexively about the kinds of difficulties we encountered as part of a more dialogical, situated, and embodied approach to research governance, and in academic discussions more widely, one that recognizes mutual vulnerability as the basis of research ethics. As the reflections above show, in our case it took some time to absorb and acknowledge the assumptions embedded in the research process, and to become fully, reflexively aware of their implications for the subject positions into which we were (respectively) hailed. This highlights for us, and

hopefully for others, that difficult conversations may be ongoing and emergent, unfolding over time and, in our case, in dialogue, in order to make sense of complex - but we also hope, contestable – experiences.

In this sense, as a moment of 'disruptive reflexivity' (Bell and Willmott, 2020: 1371), our dialogue has illustrated some of the ways in which embodied knowing is central to reflexive research practice (Johnson, 2020), yet is often written out of our accounts and experiences of it, including within and through paternalistic approaches to research governance. Perpetuating adherence to 'scientific' norms, such approaches govern what is regarded as worthy of being studied, excising much of what it is to be human and inhibiting our knowledge, understanding, and learning (Gilmore et al, 2019). Hence, we would agree with other researchers' calls for 'a complete review of ethics processes … to empower participants and researchers to recognize the reality of the process as co-created and negotiated' (Connor et al, 2018: 400). As a starting point for this, we would point to the work of feminist writers who advocate departing from abstract ethical principles and working with an embodied, relational ethics (Gilmore et al, 2019; Mandalaki and Fotaki, 2020; Tyler, 2020), reconsidering ethics as a process emerging through shared recognition of mutual, inter-corporeal vulnerability. Such an approach, we contend, could avoid similar experiences to those discussed here, if research governance was shaped instead, by a relational ethics of reciprocity that brought embodied ways of knowing to the fore.

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[1] In working in this way, we found inspiration in Harding et al’s (2021) use of Stern’s (2004) ‘methodology of moments’, recalling experiences that were un-narrated at the time and which our recall brings to the fore for analytical scrutiny. In treating our narratives in this way, as part of a retrospective, reflexive ‘difficult conversation’, we use the chapter as an opportunity to speak up and out as a series of transgressive acts about experiences that might otherwise have remained hidden. Technique wise, we draw on Harding et al’s (2021) adoption of feminist approaches to memory work in which a research collective (in this case, the three of us) (i) recalls instances of specific events and (ii) explores them in recursive rounds of communal interrogation. This facilitates an onto-epistemological mapping of performative moments in which something new (in this instance, a dialogue about hitherto silenced experiences) emerges, one that is attuned to all stakeholders’ embodied ways of being as ‘active and agentive’ in the research process (Harding et al, 2021: 1).

[2] See also Attwood (2010), Hammond and Kingston (2014) and Shaver (2007) for a discussion of some of the ethical and methodological challenges associated with researching sex work, and Sinha (2017) for a reflexive discussion of the concerns raised about safety protocols in research design.
[3] See Hardy and Sanders (2015) and Cruz et al (2017) for further discussion of the self/employment conditions of lap dancing work.
[4] Although prostitution is stigmatized, it is a legal occupation in the UK with the exception of Northern Ireland. For more information see the Sexual Offences Act 2003, the Policing and Crime Act 2009 and the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008.
[5] Butler explains the origins of the heterosexual matrix as lying in Gayle Rubin's 'The Traffic in Women' (see Rubin with Butler, 1994), but as Lloyd (2007: 34) points out, it is also conceptually and theoretically indebted to Foucault's (1980) notion of a 'grid' of intelligibility in *The History of Sexuality.*