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“How becoming”  
Toward an Alternative Epistemology  
for Gender Research in Organizations

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***“How becoming!”  
-Toward an Alternative Epistemology for  
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Sub-theme 10: Beyond Dichotomies and Stereotypes:  
The Production and Reproduction of “Gender” and “Ethnicity”

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## **Introduction**

"How becoming!" we say (though often with a subtle ironic twist) when someone says or does something that we find is suitable or appropriate for him- or her or the situation in which he or she is. And while it may be old-fashioned, the phrase is also used when the clothes people are wearing make them look attractive. By pronouncing: 'how becoming!' we condone the appearance, the saying or the doing by making a reference to the *appropriateness* of somebody's attire, words and deeds. However, the appropriateness is situated in that it is based on cultural conventions of a particular time and space, and simultaneously produces culturally accepted boundaries around what denotes culturally intelligible identities or subject positions (parallel to suggesting that something is "for the likes of you/us" versus "not for the likes of you/us" (Bourdieu, 1990:55-56)).

What I shall suggest in this paper is that in this sense our attire, what we say and what we do are related to the ways in which genders are performed, and to whether we are accepted as 'culturally intelligible subjects' or not (Butler, 1990). As such, the purpose of this paper is to explore the theoretical relations between 'how becoming!' (i.e. the construction of boundaries of cultural intelligibility) and 'how becoming?' (i.e. the process of becoming a subject). Prior to elaborating on how I shall explore (and hopefully, establish) this relation, however, I shall provide an explanation of the empirical phenomenon, which have spurred my curiosity, and hence how I wish to contribute to the field of 'Gender and Organization' by exploring the relation between boundaries of cultural intelligibility and the process of becoming.

## **The Empirical phenomenon called 'Sex Segregation'**

For more than three decades, the concept of sex segregation has received wide attention within the field of "Gender and Organization" studies. Over the years, the phenomenon has been studied from a variety of feminist perspectives, applying different concepts of gender, different epistemologies and different methodologies. Important theoretical advances and contributions have been

made, but changes in the object of research – sex segregation in organizations – have only been minor and occurred gradually.

On the one hand, researchers have pointed out that sex segregation is pervasive and persistent (Baron & Bielby, 1985), and that gendering remains a central and pivotal dimension of organizations. It has been documented that e.g. work and professions are gendered (Marshall, 1984; Collinson & Hearn, 1996), that organizational cultures are gendered (Mills & Tancred-Mills, 1992; Gherardi, 1995; Martin, 1990), and that organizational structures are gendered (Kanter, 1977; Ferguson, 1984; Wahl, 1992). On the other hand, and despite the intensive focus from the pool of researchers within the field and what appear to be endless efforts of change both at the societal and organizational level sex segregation persists both vertically and horizontally (Chafetz, 1989; Calás & Smircich, 1996). At the societal level, women still make out a smaller proportion of e.g. government officials and high court judges, while they dominate numerically in the group of those who receive social benefits (Danmarks Statistik, 2003). At the organizational level, sex segregation means that women as a group continue to occupy less prestigious jobs that pay less, include fewer promotion opportunities and have less job security while men as a group continue to dominate within the ranks of top-management (Alvesson & Billing, 1997).

While the purpose of this study is not to conclude on how and by which means the situation could or should be changed, the empirical phenomenon and its persistency remains a central concern of the study. As such, my purpose is to propose a theoretical frame, which is able to further our understanding of the dynamics by which the segregation is reproduced.<sup>1</sup> The current investigation can hence be viewed as an answer to the call of Yancey Martin (2003:361) to

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<sup>1</sup> While the purpose of this paper is merely to develop a deeper, richer, or perhaps just different, understanding of the phenomenon of gender segregation and, most importantly, the mechanisms by which the phenomenon is reproduced, this understanding may also be viewed as the first and necessary step towards any change of the situation.

incorporate 'the "saying and doing" of gender' into organization theory and research.

However, while Yancey Martin (2003) proposes that research aimed at understanding the mechanisms by which sex segregation is produced may be done by applying a two-sided dynamic – "gendering practices" and "practicing of gender" – this study focuses exclusively on the latter of the two. The choice of only one of the two-sided dynamic is based upon the fundamental assumption that studies of "practicing of gender" may be taken to be an empirical question (e.g. how is gender practiced/performed in a local, organizational context?), whereas any analysis of "gendering practices" involves an *a priori* judgment of what denotes "gender equality", as well as "femininity" and "masculinity", which in my perspective is reminiscent of conducting research by applying 'the God-trick of seeing everything from nowhere', as Donna Haraway (1991:188) has so eloquently phrased it. Hence, the analytical starting point of this paper is to introduce the gender perspective applied in this study, which will be the point of departure for further discussions of how gender and the construction of subject positions are related to one another. In order to establish the analytical perspective of this study I shall begin by introducing the understanding of gender that lies at its base.

### **Gender perspective: Sex as the main classificatory principle**

While 'to classify is human' (Bowker & Star, 2002:1), the classificatory principles applied (e.g. by which dichotomies or differences classifications are made) are negotiated socially, culturally, if not politically. In Bowker & Star's perspective (2002:10), a classification is a spatial, temporal, or spatio-temporal segmentation of the world. A "classification system" is a set of boxes (metaphorical or literal) into which things can be put to do some kind of work – bureaucratic or knowledge production". According to Bowker & Star (2002:10) classification systems exhibit the following properties:

1. There are consistent, unique classificatory principles in operation.

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2. The categories are mutually exclusive.
3. The system is complete.

While Bowker & Star (2002:11) claim that 'no real-world classification system that we have looked at meets these "simple" requirements and we doubt that any ever could', I will propose that the current classification system using sex as the primary classificatory principle may be the one that comes closest.<sup>2</sup>

The case of Apartheid provides an illustrative example of the operation of and consequences created by a classificatory system in this respect. While the practice of Apartheid in South Africa has tormented the people of South Africa in more and more vicious ways than can possibly be imagined, these practices are illustrative of the ways in which classification systems work, and which consequences classifications are able to produce (Bowker & Star, 2002).

In a convincing analysis of the system of Apartheid, Bowker & Star (2002:202) quote Saul Dubow on the scientific history of South African racial theories:

'The typological method is at the heart of physical anthropology. It was based on empiricist principles of classification taxonomy originally developed in the natural sciences. The conception of race as "type" encouraged a belief in the existence of ideal categories and stressed diversity and difference over similarity and convergence. This was overlaid by binary-based notions of superiority and inferiority, progress and degeneration. (...) The search for pure racial types could not easily be reconciled with the evident fact that, in practice, *only* hybrids existed'.

My question in this regard is: At the present point, how is this different from the practices of gender? In another point in time and space, could this society's current classificatory schemes be described thus:

'The typological method was at the heart of the understanding of gender. It was based on empiricist principles of classification taxonomy originally developed in the natural sciences. The conception of sex as "type" encouraged a belief in the existence of ideal

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, the proposition of this study is that sex as a classificatory principle is the main classificatory principle by which we become subjects in this particular point in time and space.

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categories and stressed diversity and difference over similarity and convergence. This was overlaid by binary-based notions of superiority and inferiority, progress and degeneration. (...) The search for pure sex types was seemingly unaffected by evident fact that, in practice, *only* hybrids existed’.

While most of us (except for those on the far-right of the political arena) may not have any problems with accepting that the practice of Apartheid is discriminatory and essentializing, it may prove to be more challenging to accept a similar view of the current social practices of gender. However, I will argue that sex is *the* primary principle of classification to which we currently adhere.<sup>3</sup> I base my argument upon, first, that sex is consistently applied as the unique classificatory principle in operation. Second, the categories of man/woman, male/female are perceived to be mutually exclusive, thereby rendering the subjects that do not “fit into” the established categories with an abject status (Butler, 1993). And third, while the system may not be complete to the extent that some might wish for, we collectively assume such completeness. Thereby we disregard any human beings who do not fall into one – and only one – category. Hence, these human beings come to perform the constitutive outside of the system. While there are certainly beings that do not fit readily into the system, it is indeed a prominent and enduring belief that the system is an “ideal classification system”, and that ‘it provides total coverage of the world it describes’ (Bowker & Star, 2002:11). This belief is perhaps the central element ensuring the legitimacy of the system.

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<sup>3</sup> Yvonne Hirdman (2001) also uses (albeit implicitly) sex as the primary classificatory principle, when arguing that the man is the norm (the “A”) in contrast to the woman (as “a”, “B”, or “not A”). Hirdman, however, concentrates her efforts on discussing how the classificatory principle works rather than discussing how it became or that it is to be the main classificatory principle.

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As such, the starting point of an analysis of the phenomenon of sex segregation from this perspective cannot be *whether* sex works as a discriminatory principle<sup>4</sup>. On the contrary, the analytical focus must be directed at *how* and *with* what other classificatory schemes this distinction is produced and reproduced. Thereby this analysis facilitates discussions of the consequences that classifications and social practices have for the possibilities of becoming a (socially intelligible) subject.

Consequently, the focus of this study will be directed towards the mechanisms, which serve to continuously enforce or counter the classification based on sex, and consequently (re)produces the sex segregation. The main interest of the paper is thus to investigate the (situated) mechanisms involved in the process of creating subject positions, but from a perspective in which subjects are always already classified by their sex.<sup>5</sup>

### **Sex segregation, Gender and Post-structuralism**

The point of departure of the study is that the mere persistence of the phenomenon of sex segregation indicates that the full scope of the dynamics by which this segregation is reproduced has not yet been realized. The aim of this study is hence to introduce an alternative lens through which to view the phenomenon in the hope that this may facilitate alternative views and conceptualizations of the phenomenon; approaches which shed further, or a

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<sup>4</sup> A similar argument is made in Søndergaard (2000:35), where she argues: '(t)hat gendered expressions are non-reflexive does not mean that they [the expressions] thereby lose their effect – that is to say, their effects as an idea of the meaning of gender in the creation of the social order. The effect remains independent of whether the expressions are reflexive or not, with the individual who are the carrier of it [the gendered expression]. You cannot choose *not* to express something; you cannot choose *not* to be understood in relation to sex in cultures where sex is the general element of construction of the social order (...) The main argument is that nobody can leave the expressions undone; nobody can withdraw from the negotiations [of gender]'. [Own translation from Danish]

<sup>5</sup> This piece of research hence seeks to avoid judging whether the mechanisms are discriminating against women or men, and what denotes inherent features of "masculine" or "feminine" being. The aim of the study is to gain access to how gender is performed, and through/by which social practices and classifications this is done.

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different kind of, light on the process thereby illuminating new, and perhaps critical, dimensions of the phenomenon.

The purpose of this study is to further our understanding of how particular organizational practices serve to reproduce a particular gender order. The theoretical proposition is that by scrutinizing the ways in which human beings become subjects, and how that process is related to social practices and classificatory principles, we are able to further our understanding of the phenomenon of sex segregation.

The ontological point of departure of the paper is that one of the basic social needs of human beings is to make sense, to be recognized; to be culturally intelligible and to belong. Furthermore, that the process by which we are able to be recognized or become a subject (i.e. to assume an identity) is continuously negotiated through social practices. Hence, the aim of the research is to develop an alternative frame of understanding, which is able to grasp how social practices in organizational settings are able to draw boundaries between and among subject positions, and thereby to challenge or to restore the gender segregation at the organizational level. Consequently, the concepts of social practices and classifications will be related to the ways in which we are able to become subjects in an organizational context.

While sex segregation in itself may be an interesting phenomenon, my interest is primarily spurred by the fact that it has proven to be immensely resistant to political efforts of ensuring gender equality. Moreover, my interest in the phenomenon of sex segregation is also related to the social constructivist/post-structural scientific position that is adopted in this study. In this scientific perspective, sex segregation becomes particularly interesting due to the fundamental belief that this segregation is "produced" rather than "natural", i.e. that it is a social construction (with material and gendered consequences) rather than the result of natural dispositions or natural laws. The same line of argument

can be extended to account for the choice of gender perspective, which has informed the current study.

As mentioned above, the point of departure of the gender perspective applied in this study is that classifications based on sex are themselves social constructions, which materializes in processes of subjectivation. In the context of this study, the concept of "sex" will be used to signify the 'classificatory principle' (Bowker & Star, 2002: 10) by which human beings are able to become (culturally intelligible) subjects. The proposition of the study is that sex as the main classificatory principle may have become so central to our understanding of the world, that we have difficulties with even accepting (and conceptualizing) that it is merely *one*, of a multitude of possible, classificatory principles by which the world of human beings could be classified. However, while sex plays a central role in the current constructions of our identities due to social and/or cultural practices, that does not mean that either sex or gender is necessarily the most essential or even necessary component of our identities.

In my perspective, there is no such thing as an essential, pre-cultural "woman's view"; gender is a doing rather than a being (Butler, 1990). There are no inherent feminine or masculine characteristics or values that are pre-cultural, but we perform our (gendered) identities through a 'gendered matrix' (Butler, 1990:7), which has been naturalized to such an extent that thinking about sex/gender simply as *one* of many possible classificatory schemes available becomes difficult, and acquires 'work'. Sex is pivotal to the ways in which we reproduce particular boundaries of meaning and thus the room of intelligibility within which we can make ourselves socially intelligible subjects.

What follows from the gender perspective applied in this study is also that gender is *made* to be the central distinction we apply when discriminating between human subjects at this particular point in time and space. While sex may signify the main classificatory principle, gender is a practice. Gender is how and what we become. Practicing gender is what we do when social practices applying

alternative classificatory principles are involved in the production of socially intelligible subjects. We perform gendered identities by acting in accordance with, first, the classificatory principle of sex, and second, with the locally negotiated social practices, which are based on locally negotiated classificatory schemes.

Accepting/assuming that the classificatory principle of sex is pivotal to the process of becoming a subject calls for analyses of *how* other social practices and classificatory principles are related to "practices of gender". Moreover, it becomes possible to investigate *which subject positions* that are naturalized and/or tacitly reproduced in a particular setting.<sup>6</sup>

As a consequence, the mechanisms by which we become culturally intelligible subjects are conceptualized as building upon and relating to social practices, which have sex as the main classificatory principle. However, the ways in which this mechanism and the ways in which it work can be conceptualized, need to be developed further. This will consequently be the topic of the following section.

It should be clarified in advance, however, that identities, subject positions and subjects are terms used interchangeably throughout the paper, and while each of the terms accentuate different aspects of the same process (of becoming a subject), all rest on the same assumption: that it is produced (negotiated), that it is social (relational), and that it is performative (a doing and saying rather than an inherent feature of a person's demographic characteristics).

### **On becoming a subject and processes of subjectivation**

The purpose of this section is to elaborate on the understanding of the processes of subjectivation that is applied in this study. The elaboration is intended to

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<sup>6</sup> This argument is parallel to the one Butler (1993:7) makes when she argues that: 'To claim that the subject is itself produced in and as a gendered matrix of relations is not to do away with the subject, but only to ask after the conditions of its emergence and operation'. The distinction in this paper from the position of Butler is thus twofold: 1) I prefer 'sex' as the primary classification through and by which we become intelligible subjects over Butler's 'gender-matrix', and 2) I choose focus upon the reproductive mechanisms over Butler's focus on 'the conditions of its emergence'.

clarify the *where* and the *how* of the processes of subjectivation, which will then serve as the point of departure for the analyses of the empirical observations.

The agential realist framework proposed by Karen Barad (1996, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2003) forms the theoretical starting point of the discussion of the process of subjectivation. With respect to the processes of becoming a subject, there are two central dimensions of the agential realist framework that I wish to elaborate upon. First, the agential realist concepts of apparatus and mechanism are considered in order to further our understanding of the relation between meaning and the construction of the subject. Second, Barad's proposal of where and when the construction of identities takes place is discussed.

Before I enter the discussion of the central dimensions of the agential realist framework mentioned above, I wish to draw attention to the theoretical foundations and central premises of the agential realist perspective. In the words of Barad (2000:86), the premises of the framework can be described as such:

'I combine Bohr's notion of apparatuses as physical-conceptual devices that are productive of (and part of) phenomena with Foucault's post-Althusserian notion of *apparatuses as technologies of subjectivation through which power acts*, and with Butler's theory of gender performativity which links *subject formation as an iterative and contingent process to the materialization of sexed bodies.*' (Italics added)

In the agential realist perspective, the mechanism of reproduction is illustrated by a metaphor of a gear-assemblage. Barad (2001:97) proposes that an apparatus, which produces subjects, can be envisioned as such:

'The gear assemblage (i.e. a gear assemblage in which the gear operations literally work through one another and in which an uneven distribution of forces results in and is the enabling condition for different potentials and performances among the gears), which in an ongoing fashion is being (re)configured/(re)assembled while it is itself in the process of producing other gear assemblages'.

In an agential realist perspective, the process of becoming a subject is described as a process of materialization; a process that constructs representations of who

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we are by constructing boundaries within which subjects become culturally intelligible/unintelligible. Barad (1998:108) describes the process as:

'(M)aterialization is an iteratively intra-active<sup>7</sup> process whereby material-discursive<sup>8</sup> bodies are sedimented out of the intra-action of multiple material-discursive apparatuses through which these phenomena (bodies) becomes intelligible.'

In the context of this study in trying to answer the question of how we become subjects, there are several features of the process that needs to be explored: 1) the relation between power and the process of becoming, 2) the creation of boundaries and the mechanisms of boundary drawings, and 3) the concept of cultural intelligibility. These issues will be the topics of the following sections.

## **Power and the subject**

In the agential realist framework, the distribution of power among the individual gears is what enables the process of production to continue. The gears denote phenomena, which are produced by and are themselves producing yet other phenomena. As such, the framework suggests that particular meanings are embedded in other structures of meaning. To Barad, the gear assemblage is a boundary drawing mechanism, where the gears are not only producers of meaning and exclusionary mechanisms, but also products of previous boundary drawing exercises<sup>9</sup>. Thus, as long as I render feasible that the chains of words and deeds are intra-related and continuations of each other, the proposition must be accepted that the meanings embedded in each of the elements of these chains (which emerge as expressions of the chains and the workings of the gears), are simultaneously expressions of the chain and of the workings of the gears. As such, the practices of gender are constituted as practices 'out-there' (as

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<sup>7</sup> Barad has coined the term 'intra-action' to underline that a measuring apparatus cannot be separated from the object of study. While this carries a separate epistemological point, this will not be elaborated further in this paper.

<sup>8</sup> Barad uses the term 'material-discursive' to signify that both discourse and materiality matters, and that these dimensions are interrelated and inseparable.

<sup>9</sup> The relation between the agential realist conceptualization of gears, and Bourdieu's concept of social practices will be the topic of the section on social practices immediately following this section.

possibilities of doing and saying), which hence requires studies of the multitude of expressions of locally negotiated practices.

With respect to fundamental propositions of the agential realist framework, it should also be emphasized that it draws upon a Foucaultian notion of power. To Foucault, the process of becoming is intimately related to the concept of power, where power is not merely something that someone has over someone else, but part of the very mechanisms by which we are constructed as subjects. Foucault (1994:331) clarifies his position by stating that:

'This form of power [a technique rather than an institution of power or elite] that applies itself to *immediate everyday life categorizes the individual*, marks him [sic] by his own individuality, *attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth* on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects'. (Italics added)

Apart from elaborating on the relation between the process of becoming (known to oneself and others), Foucault also hints at other central dimensions of the ways in which power is productive, which is of central relevance to this study. The 'immediate everyday life' is one such issue, which will be elaborated upon later in this paper in relation to the concept of boundaries of cultural intelligibility, as is the proposition that power according to Foucault (Ibid.) is imposing a law of truth on the individual.

While this indeed does carry consequences for the ways in which power can be conceptualized, it also affects the ways in which power can/should be analyzed.

'We can say that all types of subjugation are derived phenomena, that they are merely the consequences of other economic and social processes: forces of production, class struggle and ideological structures that determine the form of subjectivity. It is certain that the *mechanisms of subjection* cannot be studied outside their relation to the mechanisms of exploitation and domination. But they do not merely constitute the "terminal" of more fundamental mechanisms. *They entertain complex and circular relations with other forms.*' (Foucault, 1994:332)

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In the context of the present study, Foucault's proposition that mechanisms of subjection are related not only to power, but also to other 'complex and circular relations with other forms' indicates that studies of the process of subjectivation (or subjugation, which is the term used by Foucault) needs to include other mechanisms that relate to the mechanisms of power in complex and circular ways. Foucault's suggestion on how to proceed with studies of 'becoming' thus includes the proposition to investigate other mechanisms as well as that of power, but also to include the relation between the mechanism of power and other mechanisms of subjectivation. Moreover, Foucault advises us to view the process as continuously affecting our ways of behaving by the means of everyday-life activities.

'Let us ask...how things work at the level of on-going subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviors, etc. ... we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc. We should try to grasp subjugation in its material instance as a constitution of subjects' (Foucault in Butler, 1997:79)

What becomes of utmost importance is consequently to elaborate on how these everyday-life activities are structured and structuring, indeed how social practices can be related to the construction of subject positions in the current study.

### **Social practices - Boundary drawing mechanisms**

As illustrated above, the process of becoming may be viewed as a process in which everyday-life activities affect the constitution of subjects. In the following, the concept of social practices as coined by Pierre Bourdieu will be applied in order to conceptualize what denotes 'everyday-life activities' and how these activities are related to the process of becoming a subject. The idea that *practices* play a central role in processes of becoming is mirrored in the works of Barad (1998:106), where she argues that:

'Bodies are material-discursive phenomena that materialize in intra-action with, and

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are inseparable from, particular apparatuses of bodily production, that is, *practices through which they become intelligible*'. (Italics added)

The concept of social practices has been a hallmark in the works of Pierre Bourdieu. While the application of the concept of social practices in this paper deviates from how Bourdieu (1990) applies the concept in relation to *habitus*, there are still a number of common dimensions. As such, the present application of social practices is to a large extent developed in relation to (some would say, in opposition to) the works of Bourdieu.

One of the central questions with respect to the status of social practices to be answered is how the practices are related to the production and reproduction of subject positions. However, prior to elaborating upon the use of the concept in this study, the perspective of Bourdieu shall be discussed.

In the words of Bourdieu (1990:53) *habitus* are:

'[S]ystems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures, that is, principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor'.

Thus, the *habitus* is related to how we act. Human beings act in ways that appear to be regulated and resilient, but which are not regulated by any master-conductor; nobody makes us repeat our actions. Our actions, which follow particular structuring principles, are not set on any conscious goal. We act but without being (consciously) aware of the consequences that our acts will produce. Social practices are what we do, when we act according to the structured structures of the *habitus*. As such, when Bourdieu (1990:55) argues that '(t)hrough the *habitus*, the structure of which it is a product governs practices, not along the paths of mechanical determinism, but within the constraints and

limits initially set on its invention', this lends support to the assumption that classificatory principles may be included as 'the limits initially set'.

According to Bourdieu (1990) our actions are regulated, though not determined, by a habitus; it is a set of dispositions, that we have initially acquired in early childhood, and which we keep reproducing by repeating our acts. The habitus is a scheme based on historical experiences, which will affect our 'perceptions and appreciation of all subsequent experiences' (Bourdieu, 1990:54).

As such, our habitus makes us act in particular ways; perform particular social practices, that other people with whom we share the habitus, are able to decipher. Bourdieu (1990: 58) explains that:

'In so far – and only in so far – as *habitus* are the incorporation of the same history, or more concretely, of the same history objectified in habitus and structures, **the practices they generate are mutually intelligible and immediately adjusted to the structures**, and also objectively concerted and endowed with an objective meaning that is at once unitary and systematic, transcending subjective intentions and conscious projects, whether individual or collective. One of the fundamental effects of the harmony between practical sense and objectified meaning (*sens*) is the production of a common-sense world, whose immediate self-evidence is accompanied by the objectivity provided by **consensus on the meaning of practices and the world**, in other words the harmonization of the agents' experiences and the constant reinforcement each of them receives from expression – individual or collective (in festivals, for example), improvised or programmed (commonplaces, sayings) – of similar or identical experiences.' (Italics in original, bolds added)

Bourdieu's ontology rests on the assumption that there is a social world in which people of similar habitus agree on the meanings of the world and of practices, respectively, and where the meanings embedded in the social practices are consequently reproduced without any conscious effort on the part of the agent. As such, what we do, the social practices that we reproduce, carries particular meanings about the world that appear self-evident to the people with whom we share a history.

The last dimension of the habitus to which I want to draw attention is how the habitus is related to the process of subjectivation. Bourdieu's concept of habitus includes directions on how we become recognized as members of a particular habitus, i.e. how we become subjects in the eyes of the world. In Bourdieu's perspective, social practices draw boundaries between what is suitable and what is not suitable for "people like us". The social practices construct a room of action for the subject by excluding all the acts that would be perceived as unsuitable and hence be negatively judged by the group with whom the habitus is shared.<sup>10</sup>

Bourdieu (1990:55-56) argues that:

[B]eing the product of a particular class of objective regularities, the habitus tends to generate all the 'reasonable', 'common-sense', behaviours (and only these) which are possible within the limits of these regularities, and which are likely to be positively sanctioned because they are objectively adjusted to the logic characteristics of a particular field, whose objective future they anticipate. At the same time, 'without violence, art or argument'<sup>11</sup>, it tends to exclude all 'extravagances' ('not for the likes of us'), that is, all the behaviours that would be negatively sanctioned because they are incompatible with the objective conditions'.

As such, we are granted an individual identity, or subject position, in relation to an already established collective identity by conforming to the rules of a particular habitus, and by reproducing social practices, which we know will be judged favorably by our fellows.

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<sup>10</sup> There is a parallel between Foucault's idea of disciplinary power and the idea proposed here by Bourdieu, that people act according to the expected consequences in terms of social recognition.

<sup>11</sup> Bourdieu's argument that the conformity to social norms occurs without '*without violence, art or argument*' stands in stark contrast to the concepts of discipline and power in a Foucaultian universe (which is also the universe that Butler inhabits). While Bourdieu may be right to say that there is no *apparent physical* violence or *public* arguments leading to the construction of social practices, this does not rule out the possibility that the social practices are the result of negotiations between actants in different positions. The argument in this piece of research is that the fact that negotiations even take place indicate that the relative power of the different actants in the negotiation process will play a part, which at least reflects that some sort of 'argument' is taking place, or even that 'violence' is done. This argument finds support in Bourdieu's own idea that the practices are regulated by whether or not they are "positively sanctioned", which indicates that punishment is intimately related to the reproduction of the practices.

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To Bourdieu, the concepts of *doxa* and *hexis* are central to our understanding of the habitus, where *doxa* denotes the 'relationship of immediate adherence that is established in practice between a habitus and the field to which it is attuned, the pre-verbal taking-for-granted of the world that flows from practical sense' (Bourdieu, 1990:68), while bodily *hexis* denotes an embodied realization of a political mythology, such as a mythology based on the classification male/female that Bourdieu uses as a way to illustrate the point<sup>12</sup>. Bourdieu (1990:69-70) explains that:

'Bodily *hexis* is political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking'.

Both the concepts of *doxa* and bodily *hexis* are related to Bourdieu's understanding of 'practical sense'. Bourdieu argues that (1990: 69):

'Practical sense, social necessity turned into nature, converted into motor schemes and body automatisms, is what causes practices, in and through what makes them obscure to the eyes of their producers, to be sensible, that is, informed by a common sense. It is because agents never know completely what they are doing that what they do has more sense than they know'.

In my reading of Bourdieu (1977, 1990), this means that *doxa* refers to the embodied tacit beliefs of a particular field, whereas the *hexis* refers to the ways in which the *doxa* is performed. These concepts become central to this study exactly because Bourdieu relates the 'entering in to a field' and 'becoming legitimate' to these notions, which parallels the argument of this study that social practices produce particular boundaries of cultural intelligibility. Bourdieu (1990:68) explains:

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<sup>12</sup> Bourdieu (1990:70) provides an illustration of the embodiment of *hexis*, by stating that: 'The opposition between male and female is realized in posture, in the gestures and movements of the body, in the form of oppositions between the straight and the bent, between firmness, uprightness and directness (a man faces forward, looking and striking directly at his adversary), and restraint, reserve and flexibility'. Bourdieu's illustrative example lends further support to the proposition of this paper of studying the ways in which gender is performed by investigating the classifications that enforce/restrain the mechanisms of subjectivation, since I take it that Bourdieu did not think of e.g. "bent" or "restrained" as natural dispositions of all females, but rather a way in which gender was performed in the social setting of Kabyle.

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'Practical faith is the condition of entry that every field tacitly imposes, not only by sanctioning and debarring those who would destroy the game, but by so arranging things, in practice, that the operations of selecting and shaping new entrants (rites of passage, examinations, etc.) are such as to obtain from them that undisputed, pre-reflexive, naive, native compliance with the fundamental presuppositions of the field which is the very definition of doxa'.

As such, the concept of social practices is taken to be the gears of the "gear-assemblage" metaphor of Karen Barad mentioned above. Social practices are thus embedded in the mechanism of materialization by which bodies are sedimented out of a multitude of material-discursive apparatuses through which these bodies becomes intelligible.

The following section will be devoted to discussions of exactly the construction of boundaries of cultural intelligibility, however, I shall first discuss how the position of this study is related to the propositions of Bourdieu.

There are a number of dimensions of the ways in which Bourdieu conceptualizes the habitus, which corresponds with the analytical framework of this study; the concept of habitus does provide some of the answers needed to relate social practices to the construction of identities and boundaries of intelligibility. However, the habitus also gives rise to other questions, and points to areas where the framework needs to be further developed.

The view of the social world in this paper builds upon the same idea of a structured, but non-deterministic social world that is present in Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Moreover, Bourdieu's idea of a (non-mechanistic) mechanism, which serves to reproduce particular patterns of social practices also corresponds very well with how the concept of social practices is used in this study.

Nevertheless, there are central questions in relation to this study that demands further attention. First, there is the question of whether social practices can be found in 'acts' only, or if e.g. 'things' are able to carry meanings and reproduce

social practices as well. And second, there are two interrelated questions, namely that of whether early experiences have a disproportionately strong effect upon all social practices, and therefore if the relation between e.g. the habitus of the social class into which you are born is "strong" enough to counter potential changes caused by later experiences and changes in social class. With respect to the first of the questions, the position of this paper is that not only "saying and doing" count as social practices, but that 'things' indeed also are structuring structures, which draw boundaries of intelligibility.<sup>13</sup> "Things" are social practices; structuring structures. Following the argument of Barad (1998), materiality cannot, and should not, be conceived as matters separate from one another.

With respect to whether early experiences have a disproportional effect, the position of this paper is that "becoming" (a member) in new (e.g. organizational) settings is at least equally effective with respect to creating a habitus as are early childhood experiences.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the organizational setting is viewed as a setting in which new ways of being are negotiated; the organizational history and context which provides the negotiations its situatedness, which builds upon the argument of West & Zimmerman (1987:126) that: 'it is individuals who "do" gender. But it is a situated doing, carried out in virtual or real presence of others who are presumed to be oriented to its production'. This means that the organization is taken to be the *where* and *when* of the process of subjectivation investigated in this study. This perspective is supported by Barad (2000:79), who propose that:

(T)he shop floor [can] be understood in agential realist terms as a "material-discursive apparatus of bodily production" – an instrument of power through which particular meanings and bodies and material-discursive boundaries are produced'.

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<sup>13</sup> The office layout and interior decoration is an example of "things" which carries meanings and construct boundaries of intelligibility. The fact that the number of chairs and desks are equal, and that the chairs are positioned behind the desks may be viewed as a way in which the boundaries of intelligibility with respect to legitimate 'bodily positions' while working is conveyed. Lying on the floor under the desk, or on top of the desk would be crossing the boundary of intelligibility of how work is carried out.

<sup>14</sup> It may even be argued that it would make sense to perceive newly hired employees as the 'infants' of a particular work place.

Thereby Barad paths the way for analyses of becoming, which takes its point of departure in real-time practices at an organizational level. Thus, even if the central social practices are created by early childhood experiences, later and highly localized negotiations may be relevant and provide new insights as to how the process of becoming is related to social practices and the ways in which boundaries of what denotes socially intelligible identities are constructed.

### **Boundaries of cultural intelligibility**

As mentioned above, the concept of 'social practices' is in this study taken to denote mechanisms that involve the drawing of boundaries. Butler (1993) follows a similar argument in her perspective on how identities are formed, as do Foucault (1994:331) when he argues that there is a "law of truth" imposed on the subject, that 'he [sic] must recognize and others have to recognize in him', and that this is a form of power that makes individuals subjects.

Butler's starting point differs from that of Foucault in that Butler claims that identities are based on sex, gender, sexual practices and desires. As such, the subject, and thus what I refer to as subject positions, is 'produced in and as a gendered matrix of relations' (Butler, 1990:7), where the practices and even the matrix itself is reproducing particular understandings of the subject, sex, and gender as well as the heterosexual hegemony.

Butler (1993:2) argues that: "Sex" is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the "one" becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility'. However, Butler notes that while "sex" is a central dimension of qualifying as a culturally intelligible subject, other social categories are in fact related to and intertwined with the category of sex. Hence, despite the fact that subjects, according to Butler, become just that: subjects, by performing according to a gendered matrix, other social characteristics (e.g. race and class) are being performed as well. Who we are, is in essence, who we appear to be in the eyes of

other people. To become a subject is social, in the sense that it is a matter of performing an identity (male, white, manager, high income) that are culturally intelligible within the particular social setting in which we act.

As such, identity is performative, given that what we do is in fact constructing who and what we appear to be. Butler (1990:33) explains this by making a reference to the construction of gender identity:

'In this sense, gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative – that is constituting the identity that it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. (...) There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results'.

Our acts, and indeed the repeated acts, which I term social practices, thus constitute who we are. We become subjects within the domain of social/cultural intelligibility. As long as we act within the boundaries of cultural intelligibility, our acts will allow us to become subjects in the eyes of others as well as ourselves. Our acts will merely have to be performed in accordance with the particular social categories that we (want to?) represent. What we appear to be to others, e.g. a woman, is thus the result of our own conforming to the cultural rules of "what makes a woman". As such, 'the naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm' (Butler, 1993:8).

By naming and acting according to a constructed boundary we reproduce the meanings (embedded in the norms) that are built into the norms historically through the use of these exact names. Thus, while acting according to a matrix, we are also reproducing a domain of cultural unintelligibility, which excludes particular acts, identities and consequently, human beings from becoming 'subjects'; from assuming a subject position. Butler (1993:3) argues that:

'The exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the

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simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet "subjects," but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of subjects. The abject designates here precisely those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the "unlivable" is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject'.

In the perspective of Butler, the process of becoming a subject thus involves the drawing of boundaries and making exclusions. In a particular social setting, there are acts and identities that are "uninhabitable", or even unthinkable, while others appear natural, in that they comply with our common understanding of what is right to do or to be. However, the construction of the boundaries of cultural intelligibility is by no means arbitrary or natural.

In Butler's perspective, building on a Foucaultian notion of power, the construction of boundaries of intelligibility is related to the productive element of power. Butler (1997:132) clarifies her position by arguing that:

'This notion of a productive or formative power is not reducible to the tutelary function of the state, that is, the moral instructions of its citizens, but operates to make certain kinds of citizens possible and others impossible'.

As such, power and the construction of boundaries of intelligibility are intimately related. While this proposition is indeed a convincing ontology, in my perspective this also provides the opportunity to discuss how power is intertwined with the construction of the classifications and classificatory principles to which the boundaries of intelligibility adhere. Prior to moving to the discussions of classifications and classificatory principles, however, I shall discuss how I view the similarities and differences of the works of Butler and Bourdieu, respectively to enable a clarification of the position of this study in relation to the two authors.

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Despite the fact that Butler's starting point and purpose differs radically from those of Bourdieu, there are numerous common denominators between Butler's concept of performative identity and Bourdieu's habitus.<sup>15</sup>

One of the main difference that I wish to elaborate upon is that whereas Bourdieu keeps his focus upon the field of sociological theories, Butler (1990) takes psychoanalytical theories (e.g. Freud and Lacan), as well as French feminism and post-structuralism (e.g. Irigaray, Kristeva and Wittig) as her point of departure. Butler (1990) develops what could be termed "an identity theory" based on the concept of 'performance', which takes sex, gender, sexual practice and desire as fundamental elements.

Butler's performativity and Bourdieu's habitus share the idea that social practices are repetitive and that meaning is embedded in the practices, in the sense that locally negotiated practices are assigned meaning in the particular social/cultural setting in which they occur, and that human beings imitate (Bourdieu) or cite (Butler) previous acts.

Butler (1999:241) argues that: 'Performativity is not a singular 'act' for it is always a reiteration of a norm or a set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition'. Thus, not only are social practices repetitive, the repetitions of the practices hide the meanings embedded in the norms upon which they are based. Butler makes use of the Derridean notion of iterability, to qualify the above statement, and continues to say that 'every act is itself a recitation, the citing of a prior chain of acts which are implied in a present act and which perpetually drain any 'present' act of its presentness' (Butler,

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<sup>15</sup> Butler has herself related her position to that of Bourdieu, but confesses that she did not realize the alliance between her own concept of "ritual" to that of Bourdieu's "habitus" until after she had written the original text (Butler, 1999:192/Endnote 8).

1999:244). Thus, in our reproduction of norms – which are based on past norms – we reconfirm meanings that remain invisible to, or even hidden from, us.

But how are decisions made with regard to which of the past norms that are reproduced, and which are abandoned? As opposed to Bourdieu, Butler's ontology does not rest upon a view of the world as 'conductor-less', even if the conductor in Butler's case does not take the shape of a person, or is easily identifiable. According to Butler, power is present in our every action. Butler builds upon the works of Foucault by stating that 'sex' is a 'regulatory ideal', and explains that *sex* 'not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies that it controls' (Butler, 1999:235). Thus, according to Butler, we repeat the actions that the regulatory ideal proposes, and thereby we become a product of the norms upon which the ideal is based. Thus, there is a difference between the perspective of Bourdieu and Butler with respect to how power is intertwined with the reproduction of social practices, where this dissertation builds upon Butler's rather than Bourdieu's perspective. (See note 9 above for the difference between Butler's and Bourdieu's perspectives, respectively, on power and social practices).

Butler positions her concept of performativity in relation to the meaning of the concept in speech act theory. In Butler's perspective, performativity is 'the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names' (Butler, 1999:236). Thus, Butler's *performativity* is similar to that of speech act theory in that it is based on the idea that a discursive practice produces what it names, but different in the sense that while speech act theory relies on the power or will of a subject, Butler finds power to be a derivative.

In the perspective of Butler (1999), power is derived from the extent to which a norm is 'cited' or performed. How we describe things, which names they are

given, are not innocent activities that simply mirror the 'natural world'. On the contrary Butler (1999:240-241) argues that:

'[a] delimitation, which often is enacted as an untheorized presupposition in any act of description, marks a boundary that includes and excludes, that decides, as it were, what will and will not be the stuff of the object to which we then refer. This marking off will have some normative force and, indeed some violence, for it can construct only through erasing; it can bound a thing only through enforcing a certain criterion, a principle of selectivity'.

The dimensions of the world to which we focus our attention and the practices that we reproduce are thus not accidental, but affected by a normative force. Social practices are not innocent activities. The boundaries that we reproduce through repeating some and not other social practices, carry implications and have consequences for the classifications that we perceive "natural", the meanings that are (re)produced and, perhaps most importantly, for the subject positions that are rendered possible.

### **Conclusion: To study the practices of gender in organizations**

The purpose of this paper was to present a way in which to further our understanding of the mechanisms by which sex segregation at an organizational level is reproduced.

The proposition of the paper is that identities are always already gendered given that the main classificatory principle in the world of human beings is based on sex. The paper argues that accepting that sex is but *a* classificatory principle, and indeed one of a multitude of other ways in which classifications could be made, carries consequences for how studies of gender can be performed in general, and in organizations in particular. In this perspective, it becomes meaningless to study inherent essential characteristics, values, interests or behavioral patterns of the one or the other side of the dichotomy. Instead, the focus is directed upon the ways in which the classification is enforced/restrained through the relation between this and other classifications. While sex may serve as the overarching

classification by which we are made subjects, gender is what we perform by adhering to the sum of local classificatory schemes and social practices.

The ontological starting point that takes sex as the main classificatory principle thus excludes research that aim at revealing 'gendering practices', and instead focuses the attention to 'practices of gender' (Yancey Martin, 2003). It becomes impossible to study gendering practices, since that would involve an *a priori* knowledge of what gender is, what is inherently feminine/masculine, and what counts as gender discrimination. Instead, I propose a path to understanding the ways in which sex segregation is continuously reproduced by focusing on how gender is performed, in accordance with locally produced organizational classificatory schemes in which sex is intertwined as the classificatory principle

Hence, in this paper, I suggest that new dimensions of the practices of gender in organizations can be made visible by studying the process of subjectivation, the mechanisms by which we become subjects. In order to conceptualize the ways in which these mechanisms work, the paper introduces the concepts of power, social practices, boundaries of intelligibility and classifications, and provides illustrations of how these dimensions of the mechanism can be viewed as separate "gears" of a "gear-assemblage", which produces intelligible and unintelligible subjects. The paper stops short of an elaborated epistemological discussion, but does provide a starting point from which new knowledge of how the practices of an organization are able to produce particular subject positions while rendering other impossible can be gathered.

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