

Hysterical Blokes and the Other's *Jouissance*

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This paper represents an attempt to theorize the feminine writing of organization through the Lacanian logic of sexualization. It also represents an attempt by a man to practise the feminine writing of organization. Using autoethnographic methods, I attempt to reformulate the 'female' problem of weight anxiety through the eyes of a weight anxious man and thus to provide a radical (re)thinking of gender. By linking a man's experience of weight anxiety to Lacan's hysteric's discourse, I demonstrate how men can experience the Other's *jouissance* and find themselves 'on the feminine side'. I then use this logic to argue that the feminine writing of organization is an attempt to harness the Other's *jouissance*, as author to place oneself as the object of the Other's desire, in other words to become hysterical.

Keywords: feminine writing, Lacan, gender, weight, hysteric

An introduction: On purpose and method(ology)

My purpose in this paper is to demonstrate how the 'feminine' writing of organizations can be seen as an attempt to harness what Jacques Lacan calls the Other's *jouissance* (Lacan, 1998; see also Dickson, 2011 for a theorization of the 'nature' and 'types' of *jouissance*) through the hysteric's discourse (Fotaki and Harding, 2013) to disrupt the phallogocentrism that has dominated the field of organization studies. To theorize this, I use an example (or perhaps, an analogy) based on my own (unconscious) harnessing of the *jouissance* of the Other as an hysterical man 'Othered' by the women-focused weight industry. Throughout I link this to examples of work in the organization studies literature that I argue also demonstrate the operation of the discourse of the hysteric. In this first section, I briefly expose my autoethnographic method and talk about the empirical field (the weight industry). In the second section, I describe the theory and discuss aspects of the Lacanian literature in organization studies. I then present two inter-linked 'results' sections before concluding with a reflection on my own (mis)practice of writing the feminine.

I wrote the paragraph above for clarity, I have debated about this, it feels like a sanitizing force — like the phallus has erupted into my hysterical speech. I actually wanted to start like this:

I do not fit in any of the obvious ways in which a man can be woman. I am not queer or transsexual. I do not look 'like' a woman. No one has ever confused my biology. I am married, I have two children, I am white and from a fairly privileged middle-class family. Despite all this evidence of my inherent maleness, I suffer a symptom representative of a 'condition' that has been described famously as 'a Feminist Issue' (Orbach, 1978, p. 22). I am anxious about my weight. The first time I can consciously remember feeling like a fatty was in 1991 when the boys in my gym class chanted 'boomba, boomba, boomba' as I started the run-up to the long jump. Since then I saw my weight as an issue and my body as a living problem. Like the majority of weight-anxious people I continue to attempt to discover a 'cure' for my problem within the world of science (diet and exercise), though at some point I came across Susie Orbach's book *Fat is a Feminist Issue* (1978, p. 335) and read it with some hope for my 'personal recovery'.

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Just because I am 'not' a woman doesn't mean that it won't apply to me? Is that right?

However, reading Orbach's analysis was a violent encounter; her focus on women was so frustrating; and for me her words continue to be simultaneously compelling and repelling. To me, Orbach is in many ways complicit in the weight industry; although she is clearly a campaigner against the excesses of aspects of this rather horrible industry (Dickson, 2011), the main thesis in *Fat is a Feminist Issue* revolves around 'fatness' as a social pathology (I certainly get this) and then links this to the plight of women in a misogynist world. Ok, so why is this such an issue for me? Surely Orbach isn't writing about my 'weight issues'?

As an aside it may be interesting for the reader to note that I lost around 40 kg in 2006 after about 20 years of trying, then maintained this for 4 years by running many miles. Then after having children and getting older and more physically broken, I gained about half of this back, which is not strange, but it is painful.

This paper is an autoethnography. Following what is now an established tradition in the critical social sciences (Boylorn and Orbe, 2013; Chang *et al.*, 2012), I utilize my personal stories and reflections as data. I include these in indented italics like the sentences above. Some of these have dates in brackets at the end and some do not. Those with dates are things I have written before 'now' and I reproduce those here as data to be analysed. Those without dates, like the sentences above, represent an-Other voice in my text, a reflective voice — expressing doubt or sorrow or another non-academic-like emotion. In this way my text is a little 'dirty' (Pullen and Rhodes, 2008, p. 242); it is less sanitized than others. In this way I aim to produce a text that is less phallic, to allow my 'very' male body to write what I see as the feminine.

For me, embracing a combination of autoethnography and Lacanian psychoanalysis is both productive and ethical (Dauphinee, 2010; Dickson, 2011, 2014). It focuses the lens on one's own culture, recognizing that the 'one' is a site of the social and can thus be a productive force for understanding the various relations that humans have. (Following Lacan (2007), I would call these discourses, or 'social bonds', of which the hysteric is one; for a full description of these, see Fotaki and Harding, 2013.) Its ethics reside in the recognition that a researcher cannot represent the other in any truthful way, but rather must interpret the other via their own subjectivity, and Lacanian psychoanalysis provides a unique position from which to view this odd position.

On theory: Lacan and feminine sexuality in organization studies

My intention in this section is to briefly (under)write my theorization via an account of the use of Lacan in organization studies. Obviously this is a difficult job to do with limited space, so I will quickly move to a focus particularly on the appropriation of Lacan's theory of sexuation (Lacan, 1998; Mitchell and Rose, 1983) in the organizational literature.

Driver (2005, 2008), Jones and Spicer (2005) and Roberts (2005) kicked off my interest in Lacanian theory almost a decade ago now. I was taken by their radicality, how they re-wrote 'the construction of subjectivity and identity in discourses of organization' as Sheena Vachhani (2012, p. 1239) has recently phrased it. These 'early' Lacanian pieces were the launch pad for some fascinating work since; of note for me has been Hoedemaekers (2007) and Hoedemaekers and Keegan (2010). I really like Hoedemaekers' notion of the 'productive failure' (2007, p.13) as it emphasizes the importance of recognizing the lack that is central to Lacan's Symbolic.

In fact embracing, rejoicing and revelling in that lack!

I have also really enjoyed the use of Lacanian theory as a way of thinking about organizational 'development' (Arnaud, 1998, 2002, 2003; Arnaud and Vanheule, 2007; Vanheule and Verhaeghe, 2004, for instance). For me, this 'application' of Lacanian theory to the traditional phallic symbolizations of the consulting industry is an innovative and disruptive demonstration of the potentiality of Lacanian theory. I interpret these authors as hystericizing the master in the 'change' space (usually dominated by Human Resource Management and Organizational Development). I argue that they represent a device of the feminine writing of organizations, even if they do not directly draw this link themselves.

Very recently, there has been 'a turn' in the psychoanalytically informed organizational literature towards an engagement with Lacanian and post-Lacanian philosophies of sexual identity and 'gender' (Fotaki, 2011, 2013; Harding *et al.*, 2013; Vachhani, 2012). Important contributors for my own analysis include Höpfl (2000, 2007) who, in 'the suffering son', put Kristeva to 'work' on the literature with admirable, intriguing results — I also lean on aspects of Kristeva's (2004) insight for my theorization in the results sections. Then in 'the codex' Höpfl 'undoes gender by disrupting the coherence and regulatory mechanisms of the codex and makes visible the male erection that is concealed by the codpiece' (Pullen and Knights, 2007, p. 510). More recently, Lacan's theory of sexualization, as it is defined in Seminar XX *Encore* (Lacan, 1998), has become the subject of the organizational literature. Key to this is Fotaki and Harding's (2013) call for a more hysterical academy. Using a productive combination of Lacanian discourse theory (Dickson, 2011, 2014; Sköld, 2010) and Lacan's theory of sexualization, they argue that business school academics are actually more hysterical than they may be aware. Key to this argument is an awareness, often forgotten in those looking to 'lean on' Lacan's theory of discourses (Nobus and Quinn, 2005), that all subjects are bonded relationally by these discourses, and we at times assume agency in each of the discourses. However, the tendency of the business school academic to rest in the armchair that is the discourse of the university eludes no-one, as Fotaki and Harding describe of their own work: 'We write within the discourse of the university and in so doing elucidate the discourse of the master, and we do this with the intention of bringing about changes in discourses and practices which subordinate women and other oppressed groups' (2013, p. 164).

The phallic tropes of academic writing appear foreign to the student; enigmatic to the early career academic; normal to the establish academic; and second nature to the Chair. This is how the discourse of the university works, it is a(l)lure.

In this section, because of the limits of space, I have only touched on a rich and growing body of literature in this productive arena; in particular the emerging consideration of the post-Lacanian feminists will be a productive force in the coming years (Fotaki, 2013). In the following two sections I lay out my argument. In the first I explore the nature of the Other's *jouissance* as distinct from phallic *jouissance* and subsequently theorize my encounter with Orbach and the 'feminist' appropriation of weight via the discourse of the hysteric. In the second, I extend this theorization to 'think' about feminine writing of organizations.

Result, part 1: Locating the Other's *jouissance* in the hysterical man

Central to my thesis in this paper is the claim that most writing in field of Organization Studies is 'squarely' in the realm of what Lacan calls phallic *jouissance*. It is this masculine writing, all-encompassed by the discourse of the university (Fotaki and Harding, 2013) that attempts to 'patch up' what is a cracked Symbolic, by presenting itself as having some form of privileged relationship to a 'truth'. The relationship that this type of literature has to Lacan's register of the Real is intriguing; it attempts to 'paper over' the ruptures in the Symbolic, presenting itself as a sort of toupée for its own inherent baldness.

Please excuse the analogy here. I suspect that I am still trying to come to terms with my own baldness which may be why I recently wrote 'I want to build a nest in your hair' on my office door (from the Tom Waits' song 'I'll shoot the moon').

Also central to my thesis is that the resistance that has erupted within the phallogocentric organizational literature (e.g., Höpfl, 2007; Pullen and Rhodes, 2008) follows the psychoanalytic production process of hystericization, and works to experience the Other's *jouissance*. To explain this, I start with a consideration of the alienating *jouissance* of the weight-anxious man.

Bess' *jouissance* is a *jouissance* 'of the Other' in more than one way: it is not only enjoyment in words but also (and this is ultimately just another aspect of the same thing) in the sense of utter alienation — her enjoyment is totally alienated/externalized in Jan as her Other. That is, it resides entirely in her awareness that she is enabling the Other to enjoy. (Žižek, 2002, pp. 59–60)

This anecdote comes from a movie storyline where the main female character Bess's male partner Jan is hospitalized. He requires Bess to seek sexual experiences with other men and then report these to Jan. She gains *jouissance* from this experience, but in Žižek's analysis, only when she recounts the experience to Jan. She revels in the awareness that she is enabling the Other to enjoy. I think something akin to this situation can be shown in an experience I had with my doctor:

I went to visit my doctor today. It was her that started me on the weight-loss journey (back in 2006). Then she convinced me to try a weight-loss medication that had an immediate effect. It had been almost a year since I had seen her in person, we chatted for a while about my new son (just over a year old) and she mentioned that she had seen me out running and that I looked like I was keeping up a good pace. I glibly replied that I was actually pretty slow; because I had gained about 10 kg since my son was born (it seems that being a father is more fun than running long distances). She said 'oh well, you can sort that out with portion control — just cut out one piece of bread at lunch and one potato at dinner'! (July, 2011)

Traditionally this type of statement from a health authority figure would have sent me into a phallic *jouissance* tailspin. The chains of the symbolic would have made this about me, disciplined me and exacerbated anxiety, from which I would have gained phallic pleasure/pain. However, this time I also enjoyed something else — that is, I 'got off' by watching my doctor enjoying her attempt to 'correct' my 'aberrant' behaviour. Upon reflection, I think this was an example of feminine *jouissance* in operation, like Bess in Žižek's analysis; my *jouissance* came as I watched the Other enjoy my 'undisciplined' body. This is the *jouissance* experienced by those who resist the healthy discourse; when they see their 'immorality' (Dickson, 2014) enabling the Other to enjoy.

There is a link here between the subject's experience of the Other's *jouissance* and the discourse of the hysteric. By imagining themselves to be in possession of the Other's object of desire, hysterics are able to see outside of the phallus (Fink, 1995), though they do pay a price for this: 'the hysteric suffers in the way he does because he remains frozen in the position of the object loved, cherished, and desired by the Other of his unconscious fantasies' (Nasio, 1998, p. 116). This position as the object of Other's desire is alienating in terms of unconscious sexuality for the biologically male hysteric:

[T]he subject's urgent question is: what kind of mask am I wearing? In other words, what kind of an object am I for her? Am I a man or a woman? This would be the question for the male hysteric. He has doubts about his sex and his being; therefore he expects to get an answer from the Other, just as a female hysteric does. And, in order to obtain this answer, he places himself as the ultimate object of the Other's desire, but the object whose allure is linked to the fact that he always vanishes and can never be possessed. (Salecl, 1997, p. 21)

This link to hysteria is not one to be taken lightly, as the traditional association of hysteria as a female problem runs a risk of offering a too easily made link to the question of the weight-anxious man — that is, he is simply suffering a feminine condition. Monaghan points out how this is occurring readily in our society by giving a range of examples, such as citing a weight-loss researcher who has called fat men 'pregnant' (2008, p. 101). My intention is not to add support to the feminization of men's fat bodies in any specific way but to think about the relationship between the male and the Other via Susie Orbach's words:

Boys are breast fed for longer than girls, each feed lasts longer, boys are weaned more gradually, they are potty trained later, they are held more. In work with mothers specifically around gender and appetites we know that where mothers are gleeful about the appetites of their sons, they are wary of daughters with large ones. (2004, p. 147)

With the recounting of 'empirical facts' about how mothers interact with sons differently than with daughters, everything seems to make sense — if girls grow up watching the Other carefully watch how much they eat, they are likely to mirror that behaviour. However, the plight of those biological males might be equally more traumatic, depending on the specifics of their socialized situation.

In many ways whilst I was growing up my appetite was not responded to with 'glee', Susie. My family was pretty worried about my appetite. However, I will admit it was responded to with abundant glee and admiration by my mates as we competed in the mixed grill contest to see how much and how quickly we could eat a huge plate of meat.

I argue that this polarizing beginning, which has become more common for boys alongside the growth of the obesity epidemic rhetoric over the past few decades (Dickson, 2014), creates a paradox in the speaking being's relationship to their gender: I was treated like a girl (in relation to appetite) but generally wanted and was expected to be and act like a boy. I see this unconscious sexual identity disjunction as being enacted in an embodied sense, in that it first manifests in the body of weight-anxious men; as obese, or anorexic, or bulimic, or bodybuilder, and this symptom is best understood in terms of hysteria; imaginary, somatic → embodied.

To counter my fairly determinate analysis, I imagine that Orbach would 'contain' it with recourse to the following phrase:

In crude terms, I suspect that a suitably adapted attachment interview research project looking at the body would discover many aspects of transgenerational transmission of insecure bodies, particularly from mothers to daughters (but also from mothers to sons). (2004, p. 147)

Although my specific man-plight is bracketed/alienated at the end of the paragraph, it is still there — clear and concise. I have received, via transmission, an insecure body courtesy of my mother.

She also gifted me a practical do-it-yourself attitude, some significant sporting prowess, a sharp wit, an understanding of the role of a good husband and an enquiring mind, and all of these things (and many more) are represented within my subjectivity?

But what purpose would Orbach's theoretical research project have? Confirmation of the 'answer' would only work to draw more attention to the effects of the gaze of the Other. Is the purpose, then, to re-direct this gaze? Is it to try and prevent the transmission of insecure bodies to the next generation? For me, this is the classic action of the discourse of the university: we have a theory; we need to produce more knowledge to confirm the theory. Orbach, perhaps unsurprisingly, has become an agent of the discourse of the university; she calls for 'knowledge' to answer a question she claims to already 'know' the answer to. The result is perhaps predictable, a further alienated subject.

My conclusion here is that the development of embodied weight anxiety in an increasing number of male subjects has come about as a result of the changing symbolic structures available for a boy or man to construct a stable fantasy of identity in relation to body weight. This impact has landed some boys and men into a hysterical relationship to their weight and thus their 'desire is sustained by the Other's symptom' (Soler, 2002, p. 52) and supported by 'our' access to the Other's *jouissance* (Fink, 1995, p. 107).

Personally, I think it is a privilege to have a hysterical relationship to my body.

The tension that remains in my analysis above is the disjunction inherent within all discourse. There is a paradox in that, as Nobus and Quinn have said, 'the truth both is and is not spoken' (2005, p. 132). The hysteric in me 'speaks from the place of confusion and disorder, yet reconstructs the master as an idol' (p. 131). However, somewhat ironically, I am attempting to occupy this place of the master by surreptitiously assuming a position as agent of knowledge and enacting the discourse of the university whilst writing these words (Fotaki and Harding, 2013). Thus, the discourse of the university can claim another scalp in its aim 'to make products (outputs, students) that also "speak product" and thus intellectualize their alienation' (Nobus and Quinn, 2005, p. 135). In the next section, I take this theorization of the hysteric's relation to the Other's *jouissance* and think about its desire in relation to the process of writing in organization studies.

Result, part 2: Displacing the phallus with the feminine: Desire in the hysteric

What is called for is a writing characterized by fertility and fecundity rather than virility where the phallus shrivels in its loneliness as faced by the possibility of generative difference ... the space within which such writing unfolds does not work from a position of attack against the masculine, but rather promotes a fluid, bisexual space ... The space may seduce the masculine through the fluidity of the feminine. (Phillips *et al.*, 2014, p. 326)

For me, Lacan's register of the real and its affiliate feminine *jouissance* provide a wellspring of fertile potentiality, and this potentiality is supplementary to the frigidity of phallic discourse. In *Encore*, Lacan argues that a subject who is located on the feminine side of the formula of sexualization experiences the Other's *jouissance*. There is something alluring within the 'not all' (Mitchell and Rose, 1983, p. 152) of the feminine structure that appears to be able to skirt around the weight anxiety experienced by a growing number of male subjects. Important here is the differentiation between something that 'is all' and something that is actively 'not all'. The 'is all' refers to the persistence of the phallic function in its job of tying up systems into an all; in relation to the weight industry this might mean assimilating 'all' correct ways of being and bringing these into line with what I have elsewhere called the 'Symbolic Good' that is the Body Mass Index (Dickson, 2014), the weight industry's God. Specifically, this 'all-ing' leaves no space for the irreducible nature of the lacking subject; in other words, it leaves no space for femininity. Julia Kristeva writes how women experience and react to this totality required by phallic logic:

By tracing the twists and turns required of the female subject ... we can understand the irreducible strangeness that a woman feels in the phallic-symbolic order and that leads to a display of anxiety or conversion symptoms in the hysteric, when she settles for denial of the phallus and castration. At best, this strangeness takes on the aspect of anti-authoritarian dissatisfaction, incomprehensible to social rationality, hence, 'What do women want?' — the insistent question that Freud is not alone in having posed. But this strangeness can be refined into revolt or insubordination, what Hegel acclaimed in women as the eternal irony of the community. If this exile that establishes the woman in the phallic-symbolic universe turns out to be irreconcilable, it can shift into chronic depressivity, or even incurable melancholia. Alternatively it can lead to anorexia and bulimia, those failed suicidal consequences of the 'refusal of femaleness'. (Kristeva, 2004, p. 66)

I feel the exile that offers the symptoms of anorexia and bulimia. The symptom of phallic weight control, regardless of actual embodiment, should belong with clinical categories above; for me it is also a 'refusal of femaleness'.

I am 'taken' by the speech of the anorexic. The desire for emptiness is inviting.

But what does this mean for the growing number of weight-anxious men? My argument is that these men are also exiled in this phallic-symbolic universe and that this is because they refuse their feminine potentiality; they do not recognize their hysterical discourse. Instead, they are trapped in the cycles of the university's discourse (see Fotaki and Harding, 2013, p. 164 for an illuminating discussion of the trickery of discourse traversed by the subject within a Lacanian frame), constantly searching for the thing that will make them finally lose weight.

I spent so many years in this space, running many miles, so much food restriction. But it is (was) fun, chasing this phallus around the streets and through the hills.

Given the painful pleasure that is gained through this phallic escapade (Lacan calls this the *jouissance* of the idiot; 1998, p. 81) how might I speak of emancipation? Or better put, what is the truth of the hysteric? Desire. One of the central features of the symbolic register in Lacanian theory is its fractured nature, particularly, the uncertainty that exists in the symbolic because of the register of the real. Lacan makes the following statement in relation to things 'hidden' in the symbolic:

It is the imbecility of the realist who does not pause to observe that nothing, however deep in the bowels of the world a hand may shove it, will ever be hidden there, since another hand can retrieve it, and that what is hidden is never but what is *not in its place* ... For it can *literally* be said that something is not in its place only of what can change places — that is of the symbolic. For the real, whatever upheaval we subject it to, is always and every case in its place; it carries its place stuck to the sole of its shoe, there being nothing that can exile it from it. (Lacan, 2006, p. 17, emphasis in original)

Upon teasing out the main difference between a 'thing's' place in the symbolic and its place in the real, we see simplicity — in the symbolic a 'thing' can be in a multitude of places, and can be displaced by the shifting sands of the chains of signification that hold it in its (temporary) place. This

is what provides the fuel for the weight industry; by flipping terminology they create demand (Dickson, 2011). But in total contrast, when a 'thing' is in the real, its place is immutable, 'it carries its place stuck to the sole of its shoe', it is immune to any attempt to 'exile it from it'. To me, this analysis holds the promise of the hysteric's discourse for the feminine writing of organizations. By adhering strictly to desire, as Heather Höpfl (2007) does with such strength, the truth that is spoken is the truth of real desire; it is unshakable in its dissidence.

On reflection: (mis)Practising feminine writing

This paper must be considered a failed attempt at writing the feminine, because by necessity (*and by choice*) I remain entrapped in the phallic web that encloses academic writing (Phillips *et al.*, 2014; Pullen, 2006). I am haunted (*but heartened*) by 'the idea that the feminine can only be allowed a presence and space if it serves the interests of the masculine through participation in the masculine libidinal economy' (Phillips *et al.*, 2014, p. 327). But! I also don't hesitate to say that my 'writing traverses masculine/feminine and male/female' (Phillips *et al.*, 2014, p. 327) and thus serves not to (*just*) invert, but to celebrate the difference and the potentiality that reclaiming men's femininity through male hysteria may offer to the males of the academy who feel haunted by the phallus.

In the final few words of this paper I want to take the lead from Heather Höpfl and end 'as it began, with the personal' (2007, p. 631) and to allow myself the chance to express doubt and frustration with my own offering, to this end my interlocutor has the final say:

I was moved to tears reading this passage from Höpfl (2007, p. 624):

'I listen and think of my mother, now over 80, who has for years told me that I should "not say anything". "Don't say anything", she counsels every time I look as if I might be angry or fed up. Don't say anything, keep quiet, smile. My mother is a strong woman: not at all meek, and she offers me this advice more in defiance than in submission'.

I wanted to say after reading this — Yes! We all need to let the lack of signifiers be our Real (non)voices, to let the absence of signifiers signify the feminine, where the phallus cannot assimilate us.

But come on (I am a) Man! My privilege reigns: I have no right to speak of this? What right does a man have to speak of the feminine?

And yet I have written.

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