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Messing up research: A dialogical account of gender, reflexivity, and governance in auto-ethnography

Sophie Hales[1] | Paul Galbally[2]

[1]University of Essex, Colchester, UK

[2]University of East London, London, UK

Correspondence
Sophie Hales, University of Essex.
Email: shales@essex.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper aims to contribute to a growing critical and reflexive awareness of the implications of gendered assumptions about ontology, epistemology, and ethics in academic research governance and practice. It provides a retrospective account of the authors' shared experiences of an autoethnographic study of lap dancing clubs, focusing on critical or "sticky moments" encountered, and considering the implications of these for research more widely. It does so by highlighting the gendered power relations shaping academic research, showing how Judith Butler's critique of the heterosexual matrix can be applied to a critical, reflexive understanding of the impact of binary, hierarchical gender power relations. The analysis provides insight into some of the ways in which autoethnographic research on sexualized work may become messy, dirty, and sticky in ways that accentuate power inequalities but also open up moments of opportunity for gender binaries and hierarchies to be revealed, challenged, and resisted. Using a Butlerian lens to reflect on our experiences, we contribute to understanding how heteronormative assumptions shape perceptions of what makes "good," "clean," and ethically (formally) approved research that conforms to the governmental norms of the heterosexual matrix and, by implication, those contaminating forms of research that disrupt or resist its disciplinary effects. As

ethnographic research is often messy by its very nature, and particularly so when situated within sex/sexualized work, we aim to show how gendered assumptions can inhibit reflexivity in academic knowledge production, resulting in research processes that are (paradoxically) unethical. In response, we suggest three ways in which gender reflexive research might be pursued, by: (i) identifying gendered assumptions reflexively and dialogically, (ii) adopting an anti-essentialist approach that foregrounds experiential, embodied knowledge, and (iii) developing an anti-hierarchical methodology. We do so in the hope of opening up ways that might enable others to avoid heteronormative assumptions having potentially detrimental consequences for their research and to offer a starting point for developing gender reflexive knowledge production in the future.

KEYWORDS
autoethnography, dialog, gender, governance, reflexivity

1 | INTRODUCTION

Based on an autoethnographic study of lap dancing clubs in the South-East of England, this paper considers how the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990/2000) shapes embodied experiences of the academic research process.[1] It considers how sex, gender, sexuality, and embodiment interconnect in ways that reveal their ontological, epistemological, and methodological significance within the research process. In doing so, it explores how the heterosexual matrix underpins research and shapes assumptions about what makes "good," that is clean, acceptable, and ethical research. The discussion reflects on these un-reflexive assumptions and our experience of undertaking this research in order to consider some of the insights it provides into the relationship between gender norms and the governance of research practice in sexualized settings and sectors of work.[2]

The paper responds to calls for more transparency in academic writing about the messiness of embodied research (Bell & Willmott, 2020; Thanem & Knights, 2019) for "writing differently" (Pullen, 2018; Pullen et al., 2020; Pullen & Rhodes, 2008; van Eck et al., 2021) as an alternative to the restrictive norms of academic writing, and to an evocation of more relational, reflexive political and ethical practices (Gilmore et al., 2019; Mandalaki & Fotaki, 2020; Sinclair, 2021). It takes inspiration from recent evocations to critically reflect on research practice, on the techniques used to establish authority, and specifically, to respond critically to ways of governing knowledge production that limit "the potential of reflexive theorizing by *shutting down conversations*" (Cutcher et al., 2020, p. 1, *emphasis added*). In response to these calls, we show how reflecting on the more uncomfortable or challenging aspects of research practice provides rich insight into the complexities of research on/as work and into conducting ethnographic and autoethnographic research in settings and sectors that might be construed as "dirty" (Grandy et al., 2015; Simpson et al., 2016), particularly due to their close connections to workers' and researchers' bodies.

In recent years, there has been a burgeoning interest in the body and its role in meaning making in work and organization studies, prompting a range of innovations and insights into embodied research methodologies (Harding et al., 2021; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2009; Nash, 2020; Rydzik & Ellis-Vowles, 2018; Thanem & Knights, 2019).

With a growth in research on work as lived, embodied, and situated, there has been an increasing preoccupation with the experiences of researchers as they negotiate this, often messy, approach to research (Thanem & Knights, 2019; see also Sinclair, 2021). Harding et al. also remind us of the embodied nature of academic work when they note that "we work ideas through our bodies; we write through our bodies" (Harding et al., 2021, p. 2). In their paper highlighting what we can learn from devalued and marginalized work/research, Grandy et al. (2015, p. 344) emphasize the insights to be gained from working through the body by foregrounding the ways in which stigmatized work and research is "embodied, emotional and reflexive… [and] sometimes uncomfortable." They also highlight the ambiguities and ambivalences associated with research in which the researchers' insider-outsider subject positioning is complex, advocating bringing these issues to the fore in ways that cultivate what they describe as research's most "awkward moments." Yet, as Pullen and Rhodes (2008) have noted published research often represents a "cleaned up" account of these moments and complexities, effectively closing off a reflexive engagement with our embodied experiences of knowing, speaking, and writing and, in doing so, disavowing the ontological, epistemological, and methodological significance of our situated subjectivities. Further, reflexive conversations about the ways in which the latter are positioned within and perpetuate gendered power relations in and through research are foreclosed (Cutcher et al., 2020). This is particularly problematic for research governance processes, limiting opportunities for critically, reflexively challenging the norms shaping research ethics, notably the ontological and epistemological bases of what is understood, within the terms of institutional reference to constitute viable, credible, and ethical research and research selves.

In their recent discussion of unsanitized writing practices that they see as attending to affect and embodiment throughout the research process, van Eck et al. (2021, p. 1098) show how "instead of presenting a sanitized authoritative account of writing" leaving in the messiness, struggles, and insecurities challenges assumptions about what counts as recognizable academic knowledge. They argue that writing differently "can be performed throughout the research process—in the literature review, data collection, data analysis, and writing up." However, we show how the capacity to do so is constrained by power relations shaping this process including the institutional governance through which it is shaped. We show how the ways in which these power relations shape the viability of the researcher and the credibility of the research problematize the epistemological potential of the ethic of care that they argue underpins thinking and writing differently.

Our interest in the gendered dimensions of the research process developed largely through our experiences of the institutional ethical approval process that we encountered during the early stages of Sophie's doctoral research. Specifically, we became increasingly aware of heteronormative assumptions about ourselves as researchers and concerned with how these are played out in the governance of research practice. This project involved a three-dimensional methodology based on a semiotic and discursive analysis of lap dancing club websites focusing on how heteronormativity is encoded into the lap dancing industry; a series of semi-structured interviews with lap dancers and former lap dancers focusing on embodied, lived experiences, and a series of observations in lap dancing clubs focusing on how heteronormativity is embedded into the space and social materiality of the club environment. A condition of institutional ethical approval for the project to go ahead was that the principle (female) investigator (Sophie) should be chaperoned by her (male) partner (Paul) when conducting the observational fieldwork in lap dancing clubs.[3] While Sophie had worked in the lap dancing industry for 5 years prior to the research and had accumulated a good working knowledge of the sector and settings, Paul had little experience or knowledge of the industry, or any interest in it. The assumptions that appeared to inform the research governance and in particular, the ethical approval process, intrigued us and became more troubling to us as we reflected on them with the benefit of hindsight and some critical distance, informed by the critiques of academic writing noted above. They also became problematic as the process of data collection progressed when the implications of this "conditional" approval became increasingly apparent, requiring that a range of uncomfortable situations or "sticky moments" (Riach, 2009) be negotiated not simply by us, but between us, as we discuss below.

Having been uncomfortable at certain times during the research, and reflecting on this discomfort subsequently, both independently and in dialog, we became interested in how the heterosexual matrix underpinned and played out

during the research governance process, and in our own respective positionings within and through the research. To this end, we use this paper to: (i) share some of our experiences of the implications of the un-reflexive assumptions about gender, epistemology, and ethics in academic research that we encountered and (ii) to reflect on them in order to explore some of the ways our research was underpinned by the kind of gender power relations and normative assumptions that Butler (1990/2000) describes in her critique of the "heterosexual matrix." In doing so, we aim (iii) to enable other researchers to avoid some of the mistakes we have made and to consider ways in which to avoid heteronormative assumptions having potentially detrimental consequences for accessing rich ethnographic data and for developing gender reflexive research in the future.

Butler (1990/2000) uses the term "heterosexual matrix" to refer to the "ontological, epistemic schema that privileges masculinity through the configuration of gender in binary and hierarchical terms" (Tyler & Cohen, 2010, p. 179). Although Butler has subsequently moved away from the term in her own writing (Tyler, 2019), we return to this concept, one that has been widely used as a lens through which to understand how gender norms are perpetuated in ways that shore up binary and hierarchical power relations within work organizations, due to its resonance with our own experiences. De Souza et al. (2016, p. 600) have argued that, even in organizational scholarship that treats gender as performative and fluid, "a certain 'crystallization' of gender identities as somehow unproblematic and stable may occur," a process which they attribute to methodological decision-making, "and especially our categorization of participants." Mobilizing Butler's critique of the heterosexual matrix as a conceptual lens, they make the case for foregrounding "the fluidity and uncertainty of gender categories in our scholarship" arguing for the necessity of understanding gender as a process of doing and undoing located "in time and space." In our discussion below, we also emphasize how this is played out in the process of knowledge production, through the normative assumptions shaping research governance and by implication, in research practice.

In pursuit of this, we seek to draw on and develop recent calls for more embodied approaches to research that foreground its "messiness" (Bell & Willmott, 2020; Sinclair, 2021; Thanem & Knights, 2019), drawing on insights from Butler's writing on the heteronormativity governing gendered subjectivities, including those of researchers. We start from the premise that we are immersed in un-reflexive assumptions about gender as we study them yet the complexities of these tend to be written out or are "cleaned up" in the accounts of our research that we submit for publication, as noted thus far. In this paper, we set out specifically to write about aspects of research that tend to be omitted in the process of making our research appear more palatable, presentable, or credible; that is, in Butler's terms, more worthy of recognition. Pullen (2018) compares the latter to labiaplasty when she describes the cutting, modification, correction, smoothing, and tightening that is undertaken in order to make lived, embodied experiences conform to heteronormative expectations. Drawing from Pullen, and others who have called for the publication of more reflexive, embodied accounts of research that foreground the "messiness" of academic knowledge production and sharing as an embodied endeavor embedded within power relations, we feel that these aspects of research are important to write about because they provide insight into academic work that are often occluded within established ways of knowing but from which we can learn, collaboratively. While this argument is not new and several calls have been made for more transparency around the messy aspects of ethnographic research, in particular (Bell & Willmott, 2020; Simpson et al., 2016), we contribute to this endeavor by providing an experience-based account of the ways in which the heterosexual matrix shapes perceptions of what constitutes acceptable, "clean" research in the context of academic research governance. The lap dancing industry makes for a poignant setting to explore this because of the heteronormatively prescriptive images of gender and sexuality (Colosi, 2020; Hales et al., 2019) that shape the industry and the stigma attached to work and workers associated with it. In other words, it is a setting where acceptable gendered and sexualized subjectivities must be negotiated by workers and researchers alike, as both have to contend with the contaminating effects of "dirt" on their work and work-based identities (Hales et al., 2021; Mavin & Grandy, 2013; Sanders, 2006).

In developing our account, we draw from specific aspects of Butler's (1990/2000) writing on gender and subjectivity to consider our experiences of the research governance process and of conducting our fieldwork in accordance with the terms, or conditions, of this process. Specifically, we interpret our experiences through Butler's early work on

the heterosexual matrix as an organizing ontology. We do this to reflect on issues such as who we are as researchers, or rather how we are perceived or positioned, and specifically, on how we were hailed into particular ways of being (binary, hierarchical) through the research process,[4] effectively "undoing" (Butler, 2004) us and the research in the process, and rendering us vulnerable due to the misrecognition of our embodied claims to knowledge (Plester et al., 2022). In reflecting on this, we also consider moments or instances when we felt able to "undo" the constraining effects of research governance, nurturing the "sticky moments" to which Riach (2009) refers as opportunities for critical reflexivity.

We begin by situating the paper within relevant literature on researching the sex industry, making reference to calls for more embodied research and to relevant insights from Butler's (1990/2000) writing on the heterosexual matrix and on "undoing gender" (Butler, 2004). We then provide a brief outline of the research discussed here, working through our recollections and reflections on the research governance process and its implications for research practice. We go on to discuss the insights that these reflections can provide into the ontological, epistemological, and methodological significance of gendered assumptions within research governance and practice. In conclusion, we emphasize the importance and challenges associated with negotiating gendered perceptions and lived experiences of embodied research, particularly within the context of sectors and settings of work such as the commercial sex industry, and of the gendered norms underpinning academic research governance.

2 | EMBODYING "DIRTY" RESEARCH: REFLEXIVITY, MESSINESS, AND GENDER NORMATIVITY

We take as our starting point the view that all social science research is embodied (Thanem & Knights, 2019). Our bodies are also the way that we encounter one another and embed ourselves in the research process; however, this sits in tension with the tendency for research methods texts to present research as disembodied, implying objectivism and distance from our embodied ways of being situated in, and engaging with, the social world as an "ideal" way of researching (Plester et al., 2022). In response to, and as a critique of, a dominant yet restrictive (Gilmore et al., 2019) disembodied approach to research, there has been growing interest in embodiment and its role in meaning making within the field of work and organization studies in recent years, as noted above.

With a growth in research on work as lived, embodied, and situated, there has been increasing interest in the experiences of researchers as they negotiate embodied aspects of work, and of undertaking research on, within and through, organizational life. Thanem and Knights (2019) in particular have emphasized the importance of researchers developing a sense of their own embodied experiences of the research process despite discourses encouraging ostensibly objective, "disembodied" research frameworks. To do so, they call for approaches that foreground the "messiness" of embodied research, as well as highlighting the gendered power relations within which academic research is situated. They highlight, in particular, a need for increased transparency about the research process in order to more honestly, *ethically* convey the irresolvable complexity of understanding the social world, suggesting that we should strive to put the body at the center of research design as we are immersed and situated in our research (Thanem & Knights, 2019). We would add to this by emphasizing that our embodied understanding of the world should be at the heart of research governance and ethics. Hence, we concur that more transparency about the messiness of research is needed, not least in order to provide greater critical and reflexive insight into how gendered assumptions compel and constrain the research process. The latter often creates challenges that have to be negotiated or cleaned up by researchers (Bell & Willmott, 2020; Sinclair, 2021), yet as Pullen emphasizes, part of this "cleaning up" process is to effectively write out, or negate the work involved in the accounts we give of our own research. As a consequence, bodies as agentive actors become excluded from the accounts that we give of working lives including our own so that our embodied experiences of research become not only sanitized or marginalized but are silenced, "un-narrated at the moment of experience" (Harding et al., 2021, p. 7). Surfacing these moments through self-reflection ensures, Harding et al. argue, that everyday lived experiences form the basis for knowledge including with reference to material objects, memories, and embodied responses.

Bell and Willmott (2020, p. 1366) make a similar point, highlighting the presence of ethics and politics in the doing and representation of research activity, emphasizing how the messy, tacit, and uncertain practices that are central to the research process are "routinely unnoticed, marginalized or suppressed in accounts of methodology." In response, they draw attention to the significance of what they call "disruptive reflexivity," arguing that the complex empirical situations that constitute organizational life and scholarship "require imaginative interpretation by embodied researchers." Relatively retired in their discussion, however, are the binary and hierarchical power relations shaping researchers' capacity to engage in reflexivity disruptively or to challenge research governance norms foregrounding what is otherwise unnoticed, silenced, or suppressed. Bringing these concerns to the fore and urging us to write affectively, ethically, and powerfully, Gilmore et al. (2019, p. 3) challenge norms of academic writing that are restrictive because they "excise much of what it is to be human" from our process of learning and sharing knowledge. Released from these restrictions and changing our research norms, they argue, opens up the possibility of evoking more ethical research practices. Developing this further, van Eck et al. (2021) show how writing differently involves rethinking/refeeling embodied work and normativities throughout the research process.

2.1 | Embodying gender reflexively and "messily"

In organizational research, we often encounter un-reflexive 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 un-reflexive, 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.

One potential way of doing this is by reflexively and dialogically, inter-subjectively, cultivating the messiness of embodied research. Such an approach is highlighted by Riach (2009) as an opportunity to gain rich insight into social and participant-researcher dynamics through nurturing what she calls the "sticky moments" in research. Riach's sticky moments can be thought of as occasions where the "situatedness and assumptions of … protocol and research context [are] actively questioned or broken down" (Riach, 2009, p. 357). Doing research reflexively has been identified as a priority for many years now (Bruni, 2006; Cassell et al., 2020; Mauthner & Edwards, 2010; Plester et al., 2022), with reflexivity being understood as an imperative or mechanism for enabling the "meanings, subjectivity and epistemological assumptions surrounding the research process" (Riach, 2009, p. 357) to be foregrounded and critically reflected on, not retrospectively, but in situ as the research process unfolds. By uncovering these assumptions, it is possible to work toward more inclusive and ethically defensible research, Riach argues. Drawing on her call to cultivate sticky moments in the research process as opportunities for critical reflexivity, we consider below how this might be undertaken with reference to research governance, in relation to the institutional ethical approval process specifically, and in the accounts that we give of our research more widely. We add to this by showing how Butler's critique of the heterosexual matrix helps us to understand, critically and reflexively, how research governance may compel and constrain the gendered assumptions and power relations underpinning the research process, including our accounts of it. In doing so, we contribute to developing approaches to embodied research that strive to nurture rather than avoid its characteristic messiness and stickiness especially when doing research that might be construed as "dirty."

2.2 | Doing dirty research ethnographically

Research that involves the study of work that may be considered physically, socially, or morally undesirable or distasteful in some way (Hughes, 1958; see also Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999) is often, by association, regarded as "dirty." There is a burgeoning literature on dirty work focusing on the stigmatization experienced by workers due to

their diminished social status because of contamination of their identity through the work they do. That is to say that those doing some form of dirty work become perceived as dirty workers given their close contact with dirt (physical, moral, or social) in their everyday working lives. Mavin and Grandy (2013) have emphasized the "doing of gender" in response to these perceptions, highlighting the entangled relationship between stigma management and conformance to gender normativity. Important for our focus here is that their research has shown that while heightened ideologies around masculinity and femininity are drawn on to clean up tarnished identities, there are also important gender differences in workers' capacity to clean themselves up, as well as their perceived sense of obligation to do so. For example, while butchers (Simpson et al., 2014) or firefighters (Tracy & Scott, 2006) may strive to "clean up" the stigma associated with certain aspects of their work, and do so with reference to a citation of masculine norms, for example, by emphasizing their bravery, skill, and strength, articulating their capacity to undertake work that others might find abhorrent, female sex workers might find it more difficult to identify similar reference points for positive affirmation (Mavin & Grandy, 2013). Developing this line of critique, Simpson et al. (2016) emphasize how dirty work is tied to notions of "suitability" based on gender, race, and class. Applying these ideas and insights specifically to research on/as de-valued and marginalized work, Grandy et al. (2015) consider how dirty work research pushes researchers, participants, and readers "to places where we feel uncomfortable," emphasizing how the awkward moments this discomfort can generate can stir up feelings of "uncertainty, embarrassment, sadness, fear, shame or disgust." But they also contend that some of the richest and most illuminating research encounters are those that make us feel uncomfortable particularly as we reflexively work through the insights they can provide into complex relations of knowledge and understanding. We pick up on this latter point, in particular, connecting it to a critique of the organization of gender according to the binary and hierarchical terms of the heterosexual matrix that Butler's writing foregrounds. We do so in order to show the ontological, epistemological, and ethical implications of the latter for research governance and practice by reflecting on our own experience, and particularly our sense of discomfort felt at the time, and retrospectively.

Given that dirt spreads, contaminates, and sticks, researchers may also become "dirty" when studying tainted occupations, particularly through auto-ethnographic, immersive methods. However, relatively limited attention has been paid to understanding how dirty researchers experience dirt/contamination, how they may or may not work to clean up their tainted identities, and also, to how gender and other aspects of identity, described by Simpson et al. (2016), intersect with these experiences. A notable exception to this has come from Brewis (2005) who suggests that when writing about her research into sex work, readers sign the work in particular ways by making inferences about the authorship. Specifically, Brewis experienced this through gendered assumptions being made about her sexuality and closeness to the sex industry, effectively situating her as a sex worker and by implication (she felt at the time), devaluing her intellectual contribution to the authorship of her published work. We seek to extend Brewis' (2005) insights by exploring how heteronormative assumptions, or signings, are also embedded in institutional ethical governance, showing how these assumptions play out throughout the research process, having a detrimental effect on research ethics. We also build on Brewis' work by focusing on gendered assumptions during auto-ethnographical research, showing how gendered ontologies and epistemologies result, in our experience, in embodied, situated expertize being undermined within the research governance process.

Dirty, autoethnographic research is particularly messy for a number of reasons that have been raised in the literature. Simpson et al. (2016) have noted that the stigmatization associated with dirty work may silence or intensify struggles to resist devaluation, which can inhibit productive discussion of important issues and potentially lead to those experiencing stigmatization adhering to identity affirming norms. Simpson et al. build the argument, therefore, that a priority in dirty research is to convey the more hidden aspects of the work. Other issues making dirty, autoethnographic research particularly messy include challenges around gaining access, maintaining the privacy of workers involved, ethical considerations, and workers feeling as though they need to defend their occupation or saying what they think the researcher or broader audience would want to hear. Consequently, there is an increased need for reflexivity, and it is likely that researchers will encounter messy, sticky situations when embarking on this type of research.

Power inequalities lie at the heart of some of the hidden aspects of dirty research, and Simpson et al. (2016) also discuss some of the challenges related to power struggles in dirty ethnographic studies. However, their critique points largely to concerns about class, race, and gender-based power dynamics between researchers and dirty workers; hence, we seek to continue and extend their discussion into a consideration of power relations between co-researchers, as well as exploring those that need to be negotiated institutionally, not just in terms of how research is received (as Brewis discusses), but in how it is governed and "approved" by others.

As discussed above, enhancing reflexivity in research has been an important way to work toward this. Simpson et al. (2016, p. 222), when focusing specifically on dirty, ethnographic research, note that drawing from as many voices as possible during the research opens up vital opportunities for reflexivity; as they put it, "for critical ethnography to be valuable, multiple voices should carry forward diverse meanings and experiences that might be in opposition to existing discourses and practices." Encouraged by this idea, and by Cutcher et al.'s (2020) recent call for knowledge production to be underpinned by a dialogical ethic, we use this paper to draw on the voices of two collaborators; the first being the principal researcher (Sophie) and the second (Paul) being an "accidental" or co-opted researcher who became involved due to conditions set down by the institutional ethical approval process. In developing this approach, we also draw on Johansson and Jones' (2020, p. 133) call for the generation of "co-authored dialogic narratives" in order to bring together multiple perspectives and lived experiences in uncensored ways that bring our "selves" back into the accounts we give. We do this to explore the meanings and experiences, messiness, and stickiness that this led to, in order to highlight some of the existing discourses and underpinning assumptions that, as our experiences and reflections suggest, motivated this stipulation. In doing so, we hope to uncover some of the more hidden aspects of dirty, ethnographic research and to make some suggestions as to how this type of research could become more reflexive and ethical in the future. Our reflections lead us to develop the argument that un-reflexive research is un-ethical, and that embodied reflexivity is vital to the research process, especially that which is autoethnographic. In this aspect of the paper, we respond to calls for the development of a more relational, embodied ethics, one articulated through accounts of shared corporeal concerns and based on recognition of our reciprocity and embodied relationality (Mandalaki & Fotaki, 2020).

2.3 | Gender normativity in research governance

Our reflective dialog below is informed by Butler's (1990, 1993) theory of performativity, a theory based on her critique of the gendered organization of the desire for recognition (Tyler, 2019). We draw on this theory in order to understand gender as something that is "done" through the stylized repetition of acts, including within the process of accumulating and disseminating knowledge. That is to say that we become gendered through "a series of acts which are renewed, revised and consolidated through time" (Butler, 1988, p. 523), including as the research process unfolds, and it is these performative acts that bring our gendered subjectivities into existence and enable us to be recognized as viable, in this case, as knowing subjects.

The range of possible subjectivities available to us, Butler suggests, are compelled and constrained through the heterosexual matrix, an organizing ontological, epistemological schema regulating what is deemed to be "natural," "normal," and "acceptable." These heteronormative, regulatory standards form the parameters for "doing" gender legitimately, including within the context of viable or credible academic knowledge production, or what we might call epistemic labor, in ways that both conform to normative expectations and which, in doing so, "write out" aspects of knowledge production that do not adhere to governmental norms. While Butler's focus up until recently was not directly on organizational contexts, Tyler (2019) has emphasized the relevance of Butler's earlier work to organizational processes, noting that "as Butler's concern is to understand how individuals and bodies are gendered through constitutive, concrete acts or doings, we might surmise that these include organizational processes and practices and their underlying imperatives" (Tyler, 2019, p. 4).

Mobilizing Butler's writing on the heterosexual matrix and its implications for gender performativity, De Coster and Zanoni (2019) highlight how academic selves are gendered through ethical relations of accountability toward

multiple stakeholders shaped by the heterosexual matrix in ways that reproduce binary, hierarchical power relations. In a similar vein, Bowring (2004) has shown how research on management and leadership has been constrained by a reliance on the binary categorizations of the heterosexual matrix, considering the ontological repercussions of this for how leaders and managers are understood in and through academic research. In doing so, they show the epistemological consequences of this for leadership discourse and management education. Based on an analysis of popular cultural depictions of non-binary, anti-hierarchical ways of un/doing gender, like de Souza et al., she encourages researchers to move toward greater fluidity in theorizing and practicing gender.

Taken together, these different mobilizations of Butler's critique of the heterosexual matrix have highlighted that the process of becoming (credibly) gendered within the context of academic research and knowledge production is governed by binary and hierarchical terms compelling and constraining "acceptable" ways of being and doing gender and by implication, of being a researcher and of doing research. Yet, while a wide and rich body of literature has evolved within work and organization studies that has shown how this impacts on gender relations and identities, one that has developed a sustained critique of its negating and disciplinary effects, relatively less attention has been paid to exploring how the heterosexual matrix underpins the academic research process and, specifically, research governance and ethics.

Drawing together insights from the literature considered above on the academic writing process, the importance of embodied research and reflexivity, and a critical understanding of the complexities and institutional arrangements shaping ethnographic research, particularly which may be construed as "dirty," we turn now to our study of the lap dancing industry. We do so in order to reflect on our experiences of negotiating our respective gendered positionings within the research governance process foregrounding the normative assumptions underpinning this process and their implications for the research.

3 | STRIPPING IT DOWN: DOING AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH ON THE LAP DANCING INDUSTRY

The lap dancing industry is situated in what can be thought of as a gray area between sex work and sexualized labor (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, p. 166). In other words, while women are the main providers of the labor 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 work, including of the academic research process, and particularly 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 commonly 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[5] 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 by making eye contact to build a more personal connection between dancer and (potential) customer (Deshotels & Forsyth, 2006). Because dancers do not 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 sexualized nature of these encounters, along with the multiple stigmas associated with commercial sex more generally, contribute to the work involved and the workers themselves being perceived as "dirty," that is, as morally, physically, and socially tainted (see Grandy & Mavin, 2014; Mavin & Grandy, 2013; Pilcher, 2012).

Seeking to understand how these encounters are negotiated, what forms of embodied labor are involved, and how these multiple taints are lived and experienced, the research we undertook was a retrospective autoethnography of the lap dancing industry. It set out to understand, from the perspective of those working in the industry, how and why specific modes of sexuality become valued more than others, how these are performed, and how they are 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 5 years, beginning when she was aged 18, some 5 years prior to the start of the project, and the insights and contacts that this experience accorded provided the methodological starting point for the research design. The study combined three methods of data collection including a semiotic analysis of 12 club websites, 32 h of participant observation in six different lap dancing clubs located in the South-East of England,[6] and a series of 11 semi-structured interviews with eight women working as lap dancers; one of whom was interviewed three times, another twice. 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 and scholarship stipulations, 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 initial reflections below and required amendments to the research design that we consider. We go on to reflect on how this condition for ethical approval, namely that Paul accompany Sophie during the observations, played out as we conducted fieldwork together, presenting our reflections both independently and in dialog.[7]

In the narrative below, we adopt a collaborative, dialogical approach to reflect on our experiences of conducting the auto/ethnography described above. Given that Sophie had experience of working in the lap dancing industry prior to beginning the fieldwork and Paul had very little knowledge of the industry, the study combined elements of both autoethnography and ethnography that we each reflect on below.

To harness an ethic of conversation in our approach, we attempted to be alert to "the complexities and layered meanings of different contexts and power relations" (Cutcher et al., 2020, p. 15). We set this up by keeping the past open, picking up and continuing conversations about our research experiences after its formal completion, enabling us to contemplate those experiences and consider different possibilities for the research and governance processes as our thoughts and experiences developed. Similarly, we seek to generate knowledge through "conversations which are open to a wider range of voices" (2020, p. 1) by discussing reflections between co-researchers. What is particularly relevant here to an ethic of conversation is that our voices had been silenced during the research governance process and Paul's voice in previous publications surrounding this fieldwork. By bringing our voices into the conversation, we hope to explore the complexities of power relations pertinent to ethnographic research. In keeping with the notion that conversations are not speeches and rehearsed but should be "inviting and welcoming" (2020, p. 3) to all, our reflections below are intended to express our experiences without being bound by formal academic writing norms and to contribute to opening up a conversation considering research ethics as a reflexive process involving *all* those involved.

In practice, the reflections presented below developed over time with Sophie's initial reflections being part of her research diary and fieldnotes during her autoethnographic study of the lap dancing industry. These initial reflections evolved as Sophie presented the research and had informal discussions with colleagues, friends, and Paul. Over time, through discussions between us, we identified what we considered to be important moments, which we discuss below. As we wrote the paper to formalize our reflections, we each wrote about the moments separately and then brought together our work to write about what we felt we could take away from those reflections. In sum, an "ethic of conversation" (Cutcher et al., 2020) underpinned the approach we took in three related ways: (i) fieldnotes

and the research diary made by Sophie at the time of the research were shared with Paul prior to working on the paper, (ii) each author thought and wrote about their own reflections at the time, and since (iii) both authors read and reworked each other's accounts as co-authors based on an ongoing dialog and reflective engagement with each other's accounts of their experiences at the time and subsequently. This approach sought to advocate and practice writing differently as a process of dialogical, intersubjective reflection rather than self-orientated introspection, a motif that Cutcher et al. (2020) are concerned about in the writing differently tradition.

In taking this dialogical approach, we bring to the fore the aspects of the research that might typically be hidden or behind-the-scenes in research practice and cleaned up during the writing process. Bringing the more hidden, messy parts of our research into this paper juxtaposes with the rigid terms of research governance that we experienced and it provides a space for these experiences to be reflected on, and for voices that were relatively unheard at the time to speak up/out, opening up dialog as a reflexive and crucial part of the research process (as opposed to the monological closing down that we experienced). We describe it as a closing down because at the time we did not feel able to formally challenge or resist the decision taken or the requirements specified. In hindsight, we feel that there was a political and epistemological reason for this. First, because the process was situated within gendered, institutional power relations, as a doctoral student needing institutional approval, Sophie felt powerless to challenge or resist. Second, epistemologically, as we discuss in more depth part of the closing down involved a disavowal of Sophie's experiential expertize in the face of more traditional forms of academic knowledge. In combination these political and epistemological issues meant that Sophie did not know that challenging or resisting was even a possibility.

4 | REFLECTIONS: NEGOTIATING ETHICAL APPROVAL AND/AS THE "CLEAN UP" PROCESS

Sophie: I expected that the covert observations would raise some questions during the process of gaining ethical approval and had anticipated that this would be the central focus of negotiations. What I found surprising was that it was my personal safety that became the focal point for negotiations. While this was understandable given the marginalized position of the lap dancing industry in the night-time economy, and its associated stigmas, I felt that it also minimized my knowledge and expertize of the industry. An important reason for doing the research was because I was familiar with the industry and had access to it. Five years of working as a dancer and having ongoing connections to the lap dancing industry meant that I had personal experience and knowledge of how to stay safe within the settings and, more recently, it had become my academic area of study, which had deepened my socio-political understanding of the work. So, when the Ethics Officer told one of my supervisors that I would need to be chaperoned during observations, I found it understandable in so far as I would be moving around often quiet, marginalized areas of town and city centers late at night, but I also felt that I had been re-positioned in a way that minimized my knowledge and expertize. In some ways, the institution had "cleaned me up" by distancing me from my ex-lap dancer identity. The condition for doing observational fieldwork was for me to be accompanied by someone to all observations who was close enough to me to have my best interests at heart, preferably a family member. This seemingly provided me with options for who could chaperone me; however, this choice was largely illusory once I had discounted people who I would be uncomfortable approaching to ask or spend time with in that setting such as my parents. Further, some of these people had no knowledge of my relationship with the industry so involving them with the research had the potential to risk "outing" me as an ex-lap dancer. The "choice" I was left with was my partner, Paul, as long as I could convince him to give up his time, then the fieldwork could go ahead.

Paul did agree to join me during the observations. At the time, as an inexperienced researcher, I felt relief that I could go ahead with the study but, on reflection, and as the research played out in the field, the extent of the ethical risk that was created through this chaperoning relationship, dawned on me. I have since questioned whether Paul actually "consented" to participate in the field when the person asking him to do so was in a personal relationship with him and considering that he knew the consequences of the fieldwork not being able to go ahead had he not

consented. Arguably, further risk was created through the chaperoning condition of ethical approval as, seemingly, little thought had been given to how Paul might feel about joining the observations, or to what the practicalities of his involvement might be, or to the impact this might have on our relationship. It was not long before I felt quite guilty about asking him to come out for a night of observational research with me, especially when I knew that he had been busy at work and would rather be at home.

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 relationships, instilling an inquisitive fascination with the idea of going to these kinds of clubs.

I was also interested in the covert approach that we would be taking to the fieldwork, feeling intrigued about how dancers might perceive me in this context, particularly when I would be with my female companion. The latter point did leave me feeling somewhat on edge though, due to my awareness that my experiences of these types of establishments previously, while minimal, had been with groups of men on homosocial and "macho" style male outings. This left me feeling curious about how dancers would perceive us as a hetero couple, and I was unsure of how I should behave in this context.

Reflecting on the situation, in many ways I felt forced into the strip club environment. It is not part of the night-time economy that I would choose to participate in, and I did experience a growing sense of dread as the reality of the situation became apparent. In hindsight, Sophie placed me, albeit inadvertently, in an uncomfortable situation where I felt obliged to accompany her so that her project could go ahead just because of the conditions of ethical approval. On reflection, this 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. 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.

Sophie and Paul: Taking our reflections together, the ethical approval process, and specifically the condition attached to it, meant that Sophie's identity as an ex-lap dancer was effectively "cleaned up" in order for her to be re-positioned, almost "inaugurated," as an approved researcher. But in doing so, her knowledge and experience-based expertize of the industry that she was researching was diminished. Further, a potentially detrimental ethical risk was created when Paul was brought into the research in a chaperoning capacity because his own physical and emotional risk was not reflected on in a meaningful way at the time. Consequently, the condition of having a chaperone for Sophie, while understandable in some respects, was implemented in an un-reflexive, but seemingly objective way as a gesture to say that a step had been taken to protect someone positioned as "the institution's" researcher with little consideration for the protection and well-being of the chaperone, or the risk of Sophie needing to request a family member to chaperone her at all. We found the underlying assumptions on which the decisions of the Ethical Committee were based, to be deeply embedded in heteronormatively gendered terms, which we reflect on next.

Sophie: The condition of approval positioned me as vulnerable and in need of protection in my chosen field of study, as a student researcher. In adopting this focus, assumptions were made that Paul would be both comfortable being there (even think it was a "perk") and protective of me in that environment. At the time, my concern was to get the research underway, but in hindsight, the whole focus of these discussions was on my relative vulnerability[8] as a researcher and on his capacity to provide paternalistic protection as my (male) chaperone. Added to this was the assumption, 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.

Paul: 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 and Paul: Although at the time we did not really put into words our discomfort around the stipulations for ethical approval, on reflection we think that it was adherence to the terms of the heterosexual matrix that contributed to our unease. We were seemingly hailed into binary and hierarchical gender positions that minimized other, important, parts of our identities, bodies, situations, and relationships with the research field. In doing so, the organizing ontology of the heterosexual matrix seemingly shaped the assumptions made about us and the research by the Ethics Committee. First, assumptions about our sex were made such that Paul's body was positioned as protective and male while Sophie's was assumed to be passive and vulnerable, and in need of male protection. Second, presumptions about masculinity and femininity were made when it was assumed that Paul, as a man, would be comfortable in the research setting whereas Sophie would be out of place and in need of chaperoning, thus undermining her experience-based familiarity and expertize. Finally, heteronormative assumptions were seemingly at play when various stakeholders and onlookers suggested that Paul would find participating in the fieldwork a "perk" and no checking by the Ethics Committee about whether the chaperone would feel safe in the research setting took place. To borrow from Butler, our gendered identities, then, were hailed into being through the constraints of the heterosexual matrix. These identities that were hailed into being through the ethical approval process and the conditions stipulated here continued to shape our experiences in the field to which we turn to next.

5 | PLAYING THE FIELD: UN/DOING GENDER IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Sophie: During one of the first observations, in what I have pseudonymously referred to as *The Den*, we sat down in a quiet club on a weekday evening and settled in, taking in our surroundings. We watched a dancer lead another customer out for a dance, and they returned from the private dance area shortly after. The dancer interacted with bar staff and the other couple of customers in the club, both lone males, before she headed over to our table. Her focus was very much on Paul. This was unsurprizing as he meets the expected demographic of a customer in this intensely heteronormative environment in which customers are almost universally presumed to be heterosexual men. I was initially delighted as she introduced herself and sat close to him as she started to make small talk as this was a great chance to observe a dancer-customer interaction in situ. But then, I became uncomfortably aware of the look of panic in Paul's eyes.

His eyes darted between the dancer and I, while he politely tried to converse with her. This tense, awkward conversation continued for a few minutes before the dancer eventually gave up on trying to sell him a dance and retreated to the bar.

After the dancer departed and left us alone, a hurried conversation took place during which Paul asked me what he was supposed to do in that situation, I replied just talk to her, and mentioned that he could have a dance if he wanted to, and that I would pay. He did not have a dance but on reflection, this made me realize that by being preoccupied with collecting rich data, I had sacrificed the relationship boundaries between us, making me question how close I was to procuring him in the name of my research. I realized then that I had avoided briefing Paul too much about how we should negotiate observations together for fear that it would come across to him as too much of a commitment or an inconvenience. On later reflection, I have questioned how the assumptions of the Ethics Committee, the materiality of the lap dancing clubs, and my own situated position, contributed to gendered assumptions about Paul's experiences of the fieldwork interactions.

Paul: I was taken aback by the dancer's forwardness and complete focus on providing a service directly to me in front of my partner. I then remembered the context, and that we had effectively signed up for this by coming here. In this situation and from her point of view, the dancer's behavior was perfectly normal; it was my reaction that was

socially (contextually) odd. This was of course in part because my role (as a research chaperone) was not what the dancer thought it was (just another male customer, like any other, albeit one accompanied by another woman), an issue which in itself raises ethical considerations. My discomfort was also, in large part, due to my own trepidation about the whole situation, and my sense of discomfort in that setting, in that particular set of circumstances. I realize in hindsight that my response to her attempts to seduce me into paying for a dance, through small talk and by positioning her body close to mine, and perhaps most obviously by addressing only me, and not us as a couple, were disengaged and aloof, eventually leading to the dancer bringing her display to a close and retreating to the bar. Again, it seemed to me to be another, perhaps related, irony that if the aim had been to undertake covert observational research in a relatively "natural" setting (i.e., without changing the nature of the interaction), then this intention had somewhat backfired.

I then became concerned that Sophie might be angered if I responded favorably, "forgetting" the reason we were there, but also then thought that our covert status could be compromised if I did not "play the game" and respond appropriately in the social context. At this point, I felt disarmed and increasingly uneasy with how Sophie was behaving when she seemed to be offering to pay for a personal dance for me with the dancer. On reflection, this felt exploitative and left me with little agency, as there was no opportunity to discuss the possible ramifications for our relationship, or what my own choices were around whether I wanted a dance, who I wanted to dance for me and what exactly I was actually going to be engaging in.

This quickly brought to my attention that we had spent no time preparing for how we would behave or interact in the club, either between ourselves or with the staff there (including the dancers). My expectation was that we would be voyeuristically watching from a detached position, engaging in a high-end discussion of how we could academically translate the experience whilst remaining completely covert. Instead, I found myself feeling panicked, uneasy, and unsure of how to behave—exposed rather than incognito, and vulnerable rather than "protective," the role into which I had been cast.

Sophie and Paul: Looking back at our experiences of this "sticky moment" reinforces our conviction of the need to re-think the institutional ethical approval process, as un-reflexive decisions made about the conditions of ethical approval played out in the research setting in such a way that contributed to the creation of risk in the field, and to a scenario that, retrospectively, we have come to regard as un-ethical. As such, we suggest there is a need to scrutinize conditions of ethical approval to avoid a "gestural" approach to approving research because, as we found, these gestures can have, albeit perhaps unintended, consequences.

While the lack of reflexivity may have been rooted in the ethical governance process, this had a cumulative effect on reflexivity throughout the research. As the sticky moment we have discussed indicates, Sophie made un-reflexive assumptions about Paul's level of comfort in the research setting and avoided briefing him thoroughly about the observations for fear that it would put him off chaperoning her and put the research itself at risk. In turn, this put Paul at emotional risk, and Sophie and Paul's relationship more broadly at risk, during—and because of—the observations.

Sticky moments such as these can provide useful points of departure for individual and dialogical reflections on gendered assumptions. In this case, the moment became "sticky" when the conditions of the heterosexual matrix and the heteronormative assumptions made by the ethical approval process were disrupted. This was because Sophie felt familiar with the setting, yet the terms of the heterosexual matrix—and the assumptions made by the Ethics Committee—might suggest that she would be out of place, lacking comfort and credibility in this context. Similarly, Paul's discomfort contradicted assumptions made around masculinity in the research setting, increasing the visibility of these assumptions momentarily, bringing them into critical reflexive relief (Harding et al., 2021), carrying with it the possibility of opening up our experiences and the norms governing them to critical scrutiny (Cutcher et al., 2020). We now reflect further on how these issues shaped our embodied experiences of the research project in the field.

Sophie: It was during an observation in *Champagne* (another pseudonym), a large club in the South-East of England, when I found myself in a scenario that shed light on my embodied, situated experience of the research context. The club was busy; it was a Saturday night in a central location in a busy city. We had been seated by our waitress and had settled in, taking in our surroundings, and watching what was going on around us. I was really enjoying this observation, as there is so much variation in the atmosphere of a club when comparing the quieter days during the week with the much busier weekend nights. There was so much to observe, and it was bustling, so I

felt that it was much easier for us to assimilate ourselves into the crowd, rather than feeling conspicuous as the only heterosexual couple among the typical male customer base. In this instance, I was particularly enjoying the observation and absorbing the atmosphere for my fieldnotes.

However, I realized that I felt a bit self-conscious when I needed to use the bathroom and I realized that I had been putting off moving through the space toward toilets for as long as I could, but eventually had to act. I reflected on my avoidance and became aware of my embodied, sexualized, and gendered presence in an intensely masculinized and heteronormative environment. This manifested itself as a concern with being watched while I walked across the club, especially as I was wearing heels, so I felt that I was bound to lose my balance and fall while in a visible position in the club. The seating areas were centered around the stage in the middle of the club, and I had to walk past all the customers, who were focused on the stage, from my position at the back of the room. This meant that I would go past half of the room's line of sight, so it would be natural for them to watch me as I walked through the space. This set-up makes sense for the dancers because it is laid out so that they maneuver the room in order to get noticed. The position of the stage indicates to customers that this is a space for watching women, be it on stage or walking around the room. But for me, as a woman who was not selling dances, I became aware that I was in a space where we were supposed to watch women and I was a woman and to some degree would also be watched, a feeling that left me with a sense of relative vulnerability and exposure, not least due to my concerns about tripping over in the dark setting of the club, and in shoes that I was not used to wearing very often.

Paul: In some way, I felt marginally more comfortable in the environment of *Champagne* than Sophie as, being a man, I suppose I embodied the heteronormative expectation of the clientele. As noted above, however, this is not something that I welcomed or found unproblematic. Hence, although the club was busy, I still felt conspicuous, not least as we were the only apparently heterosexual couple among an otherwise exclusively male clientele. I became acutely aware of a feeling that I should have been there with a group of all-male companions engaging in some kind of homosocial bonding ritual, and that this might have seemed more appropriate in the eyes of the dancers and other customers. As it was, I felt that we were, once again, uncomfortable and conspicuous. Added to this, I was also aware that, however much I didn't want to be there, my "role" was to accompany Sophie, and I felt a sense of responsibility not to abandon her, or to bring the observation to a premature end due to my discomfort.

During moments when I was left alone in the club (i.e., when Sophie went to use the toilet, or had gone to the bar), I felt a sense of vulnerability that I perceived myself as "unguarded prey" and that the dancers may take the opportunity to engage me for the purpose of selling dances. Furthermore, I was also unsure of Sophie's reaction, should she return to a scene of me apparently enjoying a proposition from one of the dancers. During these periods, her absence seemed to last forever, and I just sat awkwardly, not really knowing what I should do. I also became curious about what the dancers made of us, as several of them started to talk among themselves and appeared to be disinterested in us as potential customers. The whole "watching" environment seemed to leave me with a distinct feeling of anxious paranoia, and I wondered if our relationship was somehow being assessed and a decision had been made that we were not here for anything other than a drink.

Eventually, one dancer did approach us and (once again) started to talk directly to me. I was intrigued that here and throughout all of our interactions during the fieldwork, none of the dancers indicated that Sophie may have been the interested party, as there were no attempts to inquire about her preferences, or any direct proposition that she may be interested in a private dance. I saw this as another discomforting aspect of the situation, as heteronormative presumptions were constantly being made, and as a result, I was being treated in the same way as an unaccompanied male customer. Sophie's gender identity had resulted in her being marginalized; simultaneously becoming invisible (ignored by the dancers as they touted for custom), and at the same time, being hyper-visible as the only female in the clubs we visited who was not working as a dancer or waitress.

Sophie and Paul: Our reflections on the observation in *Champagne* remind us that although there were moments when we felt we disrupted the heterosexual matrix, we were also, simultaneously, compelled toward embodying recognizable gendered subjectivities as we occupied our respectively situated positions in the setting that we were in. That is, we were hailed into heteronormatively gendered subjectivities through the socio-materiality of the lap dancing club setting and within the research process through which we were studying that setting.

6 | DISCUSSION

As discussed above, recent work on gender and academic knowledge production has called for greater transparency and reflexivity about the messiness of embodied research (Bell & Willmott, 2020; Thanem & Knights, 2019), advocating "writing differently" (Pullen, 2018; Pullen et al., 2020; Pullen & Rhodes, 2008; van Eck et al., 2021) as an alternative to the restrictive norms governing academic writing, mobilizing an approach to research that is more relational, reflexive, and therefore ethical (Gilmore et al., 2019; Mandalaki & Fotaki, 2020; Plester et al., 2022). Further, recent interventions have encouraged researchers to "call out" discursive practices that close down dialog, advocating an openness to the co-production of knowledge, and encouraging an approach to research that is challenging and disruptive as "a productive moment of possibility." This way of approaching knowledge production seeks to reframe research through an ethic of conversation (Cutcher et al., 2020, p. 16), of care (van Eck et al., 2021), and of vulnerability (Plester et al., 2022).

In order to reflect on some of the ontological issues raised in our accounts 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 Butler's critique of gender normativity to reflect on our respective positioning according to the terms of the heterosexual matrix.[9] 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, p. 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 that sound notes of caution for calls to rethink the research process through an ethic of care, conversation, and vulnerability (Cutcher et al., 2020; Plester et al., 2022; van Eck et al., 2021). 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, fixing our subjectivities in ways that foreclose more relational, recognition based ethics. Second, heteronormative assumptions were articulated explicitly by Paul's friends/associates and implicitly/more informally, through the presumption that he would enjoy accompanying Sophie to lap dancing clubs, even that it would be a "perk" for him to do so, reaffirming a binary gender ontology. Finally, in doing so, Sophie's embodied, experiential knowledge and expertize were disregarded or "written out" of the ethical approval process as part of the way in which her subjectivity as a researcher was framed, highlighting the need not simply to "redo the research field" (Plester et al., 2022, p. 59) but the entire conceptualization of the research process. This speaks to how "clean up" processes occur as instances of gendered hailing not only in our writing (Pullen, 2018), or in the ways in which our writing is read by others (Brewis, 2005) but more fundamentally in others' "writing" of us, in the ways in which our subjectivities and embodied experiences position us as knowing subjects or not. To reinstate, or reclaim this reflexively, urges us to engage in the kind of ethic of conversation described by Cutcher et al. (2020) and to cultivate the kind of sticky moments to which Riach (2009) refers in order to produce not just dirty writing, but also dirty practice. Foregrounding rather than silencing or writing out the "dirt" in our practice enables us—as we have tried to do here—to show how Butler's critique of the heterosexual matrix can be applied to a critical and reflexive understanding of the impact of binary, hierarchical gender power relations on the academic research process.

Cleaning up research sanitizes the accounts that we give, not just retrospectively but in how the research process unfolds from its earliest stages. We have made sense of this by showing how this is situated within the heterosexual matrix, so that the *entire* research process is loaded with gendered assumptions, meanings, and implications. These include, as we have discussed here, a hierarchical, binary gender ontology, epistemological assumptions about the gendered circumstances of the knowing subject or "expert," and finally, methodological preconditions about governance of the research process and research practice that are reflective, and constitutive of, rather than critically reflexive about, gender stereotypes.

Taken together, the implications of this for the research discussed here are such that, for example, Paul was unable to speak up about his discomfort throughout each stage of the research. Had reflexivity been woven into the governance process, then the gendered assumptions underpinning this process, and their implications for Paul, could have been better recognized, and arguably cultivated into sticky moments providing valuable insight into the gender dynamics within the sector and setting under consideration. As it was, however, the gendered assumptions that are predominant within the industry were unreflexively replicated within the research governance process so that—at best—a valuable opportunity to understand lived experiences of non-hegemonic masculinities within the setting was lost. At worst, it is ironic that an institutional process designed to act as a guarantor of ethical conduct arguably had the opposite effect, resulting in an unethical positioning of the subjectivities and by implication of the research, involved.

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, at the time, our sense of responsibility to progress the research, and of our identification with it, rendered us vulnerable to complying with the gendered terms of recognition on offer. We did not, then or since, formally challenge the decision taken by the School-based Ethics Officer or the requirements of the University Ethics Committee; nor did we question the way in which this decision was articulated or rationalized. Our relative inexperience at the time combined with a somewhat self-conscious concern about the credibility of academic research on the lap dancing industry meant that we felt there was too much at risk to question or challenge the decisions made. Nor at the time did we fully comprehend the implications of the decision or recommendations, this only unfolded as the research progressed. However, it is not simply the thematic nature of the research that constrained Sophie's confidence in questioning the recommendations at the time but that it did not even feel like a possibility. It is only as the research process unfolded, over a period of some 4 years, and as we worked independently and collaboratively, on subsequent presentations and publications that we have come to think differently—to question the subject positions into which we were hailed and on what basis. Opportunities for "mobilizing agentic vulnerability" (Plester et al., 2022, p. 58) were therefore extremely limited. Not least, our concern in highlighting this is with foregrounding 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. In our case, the experiential knowledge and expertize "embodied" by Sophie were negated within, and as a condition of, institutional approval, whereas Paul was (inadvertently and reluctantly) hailed into the position of knowing subject based simply on binary, hierarchical gendered assumptions and governmental norms. As these played out in the field, they (ironically, and unethically) rendered Paul vulnerable. Retrospectively, the dialog opened up by critical distance and reflexivity has only been possible with the passing of time and the gaining of relative job security and confidence combined with ongoing dialogs between the authors and their wider social, collegial networks. Our accumulated knowledge and experience mean that should we be in a similar position again, we would be more likely, and able, to question research governance processes and articulate the need for more gender reflexive approaches. And we hope that by sharing these experiences and reflections others will feel able to as well.

With this 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, and that we share here in the hope that these points might be of help to others.[10] First, gender-reflexive research needs to identify gendered assumptions and their impact throughout the research process. Our experiences suggested that these assumptions should be reflected on in situ, incrementally, as a cumulative process and in-dialog, in our case, between all those involved in the research. Second, research should be anti-hierarchical to avoid positioning researchers as vulnerable or protective merely based on gender (or other characteristics that hail, or "fix" them into particular subjective positions), and instead proceeds according to a relational, embodied ethics premised upon recognition of shared corporeal vulnerabilities (Mandalaki & Fotaki, 2020, p. 745). Third, and connected to this, is the importance of adopting an anti-essentialist approach to knowledge production in order to avoid bifurcation of researchers into simplistic, binary categories of male and female, masculine and feminine, knowing/expert or not, that lend credence to Butler's (1990/2000) heterosexual matrix rather than challenge it. By opening a dialog around our experiences of the research governance process and calling for more gender reflexivity in research, the stringent terms of the heterosexual matrix can be challenged, as can

similar experiences to ours. More importantly, however, we hope that it will provide opportunities for experiences such as ours to be avoided by encouraging conversations to happen during the research process, when we felt unable and powerless to question it ourselves. Engaging in an "ethic of conversation" through reflexive dialog as the basis of our research and writing practice enabled us to avoid some of the self-oriented introspection that is of concern to Cutcher et al. (2020, p. 11). Our hope is that we have been able to shift the focus of what they call dissident writing away from a preoccupation with the self towards a more intersubjective dialog and ultimately a more collaborative, collective plurivocality in the sharing of writing which is "provocative, subversive and antagonistic." 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. 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. This insight provides us with a useful starting point for engaging in the kind of reflexive governance that calls for more embodied messiness, dirt, and dialogics in research might bring about (Brewis, 2005; Pullen & Rhodes, 2008; Thanem & Knights, 2019), by interrogating the gendered ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies that we work with.

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 approaches to 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.

7 | CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: EMBODIED ETHICS AND GENDER REFLEXIVITY IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS

We have shared the reflections outlined above in order to raise critical and reflexive awareness of the implications of the kind of gendered assumptions about ontology, epistemology, and ethics in academic research that we encountered, and to reflect on them in order to explore some of the ways our research was underpinned by the kind of gender power relations and normative assumptions that Butler (1990/2000) describes in her critique of the "heterosexual matrix." In doing so, we have sought to open up ways that might enable other researchers to avoid heteronormative assumptions having potentially detrimental consequences for their research, and to offer a starting point for developing gender reflexive research in the future. We have identified three ways in which this might be approached in practice, involving a dialogical methodology underpinned by an ethic of conversation: a critical, reflexive identification and questioning of gendered assumptions and related ways of Othering researchers; an anti-hierarchical relationality and an anti-essentialist, non-binary epistemology.

We have drawn on Butler's critique of the heterosexual matrix in order to highlight how the process of becoming (credibly) gendered within the context of academic research and knowledge production was, in our experience, constrained by the binary and hierarchical terms of the heterosexual matrix, thus compelling "acceptable" ways of being and doing gender and of research through the process of institutional governance. While a wide and rich body of literature has evolved within work and organization studies that has shown how this matrix impacts on gender relations and identities, one that has developed a sustained critique of its negating and disciplinary effects, relatively less attention has been paid to exploring how the heterosexual matrix underpins the academic research process and, specifically, research governance and ethics. Hence, we have tried to begin some of the work of addressing this by drawing on and developing

recent calls for more embodied approaches to research that foreground its "messiness" (Bell & Willmott, 2020; Thanem and Knights, 2019; van Eck et al., 2021), particularly in autoethnographic research (Plester et al., 2022).

We have tried to show how such research can become messy, dirty, and sticky in ways that both accentuate power inequalities, but which in doing so, can also open up possibilities for gender binaries and hierarchies to be "undone," in Butler's terms. While, as noted above, opportunities to engage in agentic vulnerability (Plester et al., 2022) were limited at the time of the research, this paper attests to subsequent avenues opening up for critical reflection on our respective gendered positioning. Reflecting on the critical or "sticky moments" (Riach, 2009) encountered in, and as a result of, the ethical approval process above has enabled us to consider, in our discussion here, drawing on threads of discussion already opened up by other researchers, who advocate leaving in "the messiness, struggles, and insecurities in 'doing' writing differently" (van Eck et al., 2021, p. 1098) how gendered assumptions were reinforced through what we have subsequently come to understand as a lack of reflexivity in the governance process. Considering how this absence effectively rendered the ethical approval process ethically questionable, 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 the broader research process, one that recognizes mutual vulnerability as the basis of research ethics.

As a moment of "disruptive reflexivity" (Bell & Willmott, 2020, p. 1371), our reflections have illustrated some of the ways in which embodied knowing is central to reflexive research practice, 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). Our account has provided insight into some of the ways in which autoethnographic research, particularly on sexualized work, may become messy, dirty, and sticky in ways that accentuate power inequalities, but which also open up moments of opportunity for gender binaries and hierarchies to be revealed, challenged, and therefore, resisted. We have shown how gendered assumptions can inhibit reflexivity in academic knowledge production; 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, p. 400) or at least ideally so. 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 & Fotaki, 2020; Tyler, 2019), 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 the research process was shaped instead, by a reflexive and dialogical acknowledgment of gendered assumptions and an anti-hierarchical methodology that brought embodied ways of knowing to the fore. But this is just a starting point; what we hope to have contributed here is to an emerging, evolving wider conversation.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

ORCID

Sophie Hales https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3191-3625
Paul Galbally https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9247-9017

ENDNOTES

[1] It is important to clarify the methodological place and our use of the terms ethnography and autoethnography in this paper, and in the wider project on which it is based, right from the outset. The study set out to understand the lived experiences of those working in the lap dancing industry from their own perspective in an ethnographic way by building on observations and immersive research in the field. But it is also autoethnographic, including retrospectively so, as Sophie had worked in the industry prior to the research. Sophie's insights and experiential knowledge of the work and the

industry therefore shaped the collection and interpretation of the data, and the research process more widely (including as discussed here her approach to, and experience of, the ethical approval process). Hence, while it is important to distinguish the ethnographic from the autoethnographic aspects of the project and the paper, the approach taken is perhaps most appropriately understood as auto/ethnographic. As both the study and this paper contain elements of both that it would be difficult, perhaps even disingenuous, to separate.

[2] The autoethnographic, reflexive approach adopted in the paper takes inspiration from Sinclair's (2021, p. 179) account of her feelings of exclusion and oppression resulting from what she describes as the "gendered templates, processes and purposes" governing "good" research. Sinclair recalls how her own positioning as a researcher challenged her to rethink who and how she wants to "be," and we take inspiration from this in our similar aim to spark resonances and imaginings of, as she puts it, "new ways of doing and being in research" that challenge governmental norms shaping academic knowledge production.

[3] See Ellis (2007) for a discussion of the challenges associated with doing research with intimate others as potentially emotionally charged and ethically confronting.

[4] Among 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 (Tyler, 2019).

[5] See Cruz et al. (2017) for further discussion of the self/employment conditions of lap dancing work.

[6] It should be noted that the observations were conducted in the guise of a customer in the lap dancing clubs studies. Given that Sophie had accumulated several years of experience 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 5 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.

[7] In presenting our reflections like this, we respond to Cutcher et al.'s (2020, p. 16) call for reflexive accounts of research to be based on "an ethic of conversation."

[8] As Plester et al. (2022, p. 59) note, concerns about vulnerability in research focus largely on participants so that researcher vulnerability and particularly gendered vulnerability remains "uncharted, under-researched…[and] largely invisible." Our focus here is on developing a critical, reflexive account of the gendered positioning of researcher subjectivity that results from being rendered vulnerable by institutional governmental norms.

[9] 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, p. 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*. 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, 2019); it is the mechanism through which "the organization of gender comes to function as a presupposition about how the world is structured" (Butler, 2004, p. 215).

[10] In this sense, we hope to contribute to a wider, collective research process underpinning the generation of reflexive knowledge about gender at work within the GWO community, mobilizing an intersubjective "ethic of conversation" (Cutcher et al., 2020) beyond dialog into something more plurivocal in the future.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Sophie Hales is a Lecturer in Organization Studies and co-director of the Center for Work, Organization, and Society at the University of Essex.

Paul Galbally is a Senior Lecturer in Counseling and Psychology at the University of East London and a practicing psychotherapist.

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