
Article

How Can the Intersections between Gender, Class, and Sexuality Be Translated to an Empirical Agenda?

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Abstract

The social categories of gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity, and their relation to subjectivities have received theoretical attention, but their empirical interrelationships remain underexplored. In this article, the authors consider how class, gender, and sexuality interrelate in practice by drawing and reflecting on (a) an empirical study of women in the wine industry that they have undertaken and (b) a selection of contemporary works that links multiple social categories. In conclusion, they argue that to investigate power and tension within and across multiple social categories meaningfully, a useful approach is to combine life histories with theories of embodiment.

Keywords: gender, sexuality, class, life histories, embodiment

Introduction

The social categories of gender, sexuality, class, and ethnicity and their relation to subjectivities have received extensive theoretical attention over the past decade (e.g., Bourdieu, 1990, 1993; Butler, 1990, 1993; Foucault, 1988; Jackson, 1998; Savage, Bagnall, & Longhurst, 2001; Weedon, 1997). In this article, we argue that empirical interrelationships have received less attention. In the context of gender and sexuality, there has been debate about how subjective experience can be examined empirically using qualitative methodologies without giving precedence to one category or subsuming or retiring one category over another (e.g., Butler, 1990, 1993; Jackson, 1998; Witz, Halford, & Savage, 1996). We argue in this article that the same concern about gender and sexuality is relevant to gender and its relationship to sexuality, class, and/or ethnicity.

Recently, Wright (2001) has contributed to the question of causal priority of gender and class, asserting that gender and class are causally distinct categories although empirically interrelated. Specifically he has asserted that class and gender are conceptually separate categories, as some of what is consequential about class is independent of gender, and vice versa. He concluded that the interconnections between gender and class can be undertaken through a class analysis. Feminist sociologists have emphasised, however, that this approach leaves class untouched and tends to equate gender to biological sex (Crompton, 2001). Following Crompton, we argue for understandings of class and gender that include the “blurring of boundaries” (p. 39). Wright and Crompton do, however, agree that the gender-class debate will not be resolved merely through theoretical discussion. We concur with this view and stress the importance of using qualitative methods and data to extend our understandings of the lived experiences of gender and class.

Empirical practice and, in particular, a study focused on women in the wine industry has drawn our attention to the question, How in practice can class, gender, and sexuality in a corporate context be understood? In this article, we draw on examples from a case study of 14 in-depth personal interviews with women in different hierarchical locations with different functions in the corporate wine industry in South Australia. Examples are used to illustrate intersections between gender and sexuality. These examples from narratives show that although a focus on gender and sexuality provides rich data, It also provides a limited understanding of gender and sexuality. Following analysis, it became clear that for a fuller picture of gender and sexuality, subjective meanings associated with class needed to be incorporated. In this article, we introduce class as opposed to other social categories, such as ethnicity, as gender, sexuality, and class dominated the narratives of the women participating in the study.

In this article, we draw on literature that aims to integrate gender, sexuality, and class to reflect on the data obtained from the study on women in the wine industry to consider the potential of developing qualitative methods that explore gender, sexuality, and class. We begin with a brief description of the empirical study and outline the limitations encountered when focusing on class as a structural phenomenon. We compare and contrast three contemporary attempts to theorize relationships between multiple social categories. We have chosen to focus on Reay’s (1997) work on how gender and class influence women’s interactions with schools and Anthias’s (2001a, 2001b) use of the concept of social division based on gender, class, and ethnicity. Anthias’s work was chosen as a theoretical piece that specifically addresses the interconnections of social divisions. In contrast, Reay was chosen, as her study of gender and class is empirically based. In addition, we draw on theories of embodiment used in the empirical study of women in the wine industry to understand gender and its relation to sexuality in the workplace. In this article, we consider the potentials and limitations of each perspective with a view to developing a methodological approach that allows an empirical exploration of the relations between gender, sexuality, and class in the lives of workers.

Women in the wine industry: Research design and method

Face-to-face semistructured interviews conducted by the authors with 14 women in 1999 were used to obtain data about subjective meanings of occupation, gender, and sexuality. All interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed, and were coded and analyzed by the authors. Analysis and interpretation involved searching for meaning; the uncovering of patterns, nonpatterns, divergences, and contradictory data to understand the study in question (Goulding, 2002) required “listening” to all kinds of diverging data, including that which might not make sense or might contradict other established patterns.

The organization was chosen, as it is one of the four largest wine corporations in Australia. The size of the organization allowed for enough potential participants across a range of occupational positions. The wine industry and women’s place in it were chosen as topics for investigation, as the corporate wine industry, like most other industries in the agricultural sector, is male dominated. As the industry burgeons

economically (Paisley & McPhee, 1998), job growth and women's interest and opportunity for participation in the sector have grown. In South Australia, recent executive appointments in the corporate wine industry have been filled by women. We know from past research that younger women (18-30 years) are now choosing to study oenology and other wine- and vine-related degrees (Bryant, in press). Men were not interviewed for pragmatic reasons, that is, it was a 12-month study with limited resources. There is now an opportunity for future work on gender and wine organizations to focus on masculinities and their relation to femininities and work practice and structures in the wine industry.

This study provided an opportunity to understand how women were progressing in this industry and how they understand themselves as gendered and sexualized workers. Thus, the research was designed to consider relationships between gender and sexuality using embodiment to understand self as worker and the relationship between construction of the working self and work tasks. In this article, we use part of the findings focused on embodiment, work tasks, and subjective understandings of working self to explore the relationship between how the conceptual categories of gender, class, and sexuality can be translated to an empirical agenda. The focus for this article arose from the complexities and difficulties the researchers experienced in asking questions about multiple subjectivities in an interview context. Thus, in this article, we reflect and learn from other scholars who have had a similar focus, theoretically and/or empirically, and bring our experiences in this project to identify methodological approaches that might inform interview practices to gain better understandings of the lived experiences of gender, sexuality, and class.

Prior to contacting women, we sought permission by letter from the chief executive officer (CEO) of the relevant organization to approach women in the organization. The letter detailed the aims and significance of the study, the proposed method, the use of findings, and information about the researchers. Follow-up personal contact was then made with the CEO. Potential respondents were then contacted by letter (sent to their place of work) and asked to participate in an interview. The information letter was sent to 20 women working in the organization. The letter provided information about the proposed research, the type of issues to be raised in the interview, the researchers, time commitment to the project, and assurances of confidentiality. Women were asked to contact the researchers if they were interested in participating in an interview. Women working within the organization self-identified for interview, and 14 accepted the letter of invitation to participate in the study. Prior to commencement of the interview, women were asked to sign a consent form.

The women in the sample were aged 26 to 57 years and were employed in a range of positions, including production, sales, technical support, and management. Other sociodemographic data were also obtained regarding women's working histories both in and outside of the organization. The majority of women had been employed in the organization in their current position for 1 to 5 years, and the majority had worked in the organization in a different capacity for between 10 and 15 years. Thus, the majority of women in the sample were promoted or recruited to another position from within the organization. Those few women in the sample with professional careers were more likely to be recruited from outside the organization. The organization was not supportive of part-time work, with 13 of the 14 women working a 40-hour week and 1 woman working 24 hours a week (by 8-hour shifts). Furthermore, 6 of the 14 women were currently married and had children living at home.

The researchers were aware that potential participants might have perceived some compulsion to participate, as their employing organization needed to give permission for the research team to approach them. We ensured that participants were advised of the voluntary nature of participation and of the autonomous nature of the study, the confidentiality of data, and that the employing organization would have access to findings available in the public domain (with no names or identifying details disclosed in written reports).

The interviews took approximately an hour, and questioning was broad to allow participants to describe their work experiences and meanings about work without too much direction from the interviewer. Women were asked to talk about their working history and current workforce experiences as women. The following themes were used as prompts when necessary: their expectations before working in the industry and whether those expectations had been met; and barriers experienced in participating within the organization (aimed at determining gendered and sexualized structural barriers and process barriers), including relationships with coworkers and management. Other prompts included exploring women's ways of accommodating, resisting, negotiating, or challenging barriers. Themes that emerged from analysis include embodied working tasks, structural barriers to promotion (equal pay and flexible working arrangements), and gendered and sexualized culture that objectifies women and excludes them from senior decision making.

The findings are not able to be universalized across other work settings, other wine organizations, or, indeed, the many global sites of the organization involved in the study. This study involved an exploration of subjective meanings associated with work within a localized worksite within a large global corporation. The findings reflect embodied, and therefore gendered and sexualized, meanings and experiences of work for the women who were involved in the sample for this study. The validity of the study is supported, first, through women's interpretations, checked by the women within the sample to limit misrepresentation by the authors. Second, in this study, the themes, patterns, and divergences evident in the data were repeated across the sample, and this is exemplified in the third point: that the findings reflect gendered organizational practices expressed in feminist literature in this sociohistorical period across a range of industrial nations (Halford & Leonard, 2001; Wajcman, 1999). Finally, the validity of the findings was commented on by the women interviewed. Thus, on conclusion of the study, the women were mailed a copy of the report and asked to comment on the findings and to inform the research team whether they believed that the report accurately captured their input. Approximately half the sample telephoned us asking for issues related to equity in work practice, flexible working arrangement, and dominant male hierarchies to be stated more strongly. A final summary report was distributed to all participants, managers, and the CEO of the corporation.

This study focused on the hierarchical relationships between women and also between women and men from the perspective of the women in the study. Consequently, gender was understood as relational and occurring within a hierarchy. Following scholars such as Acker (1990) and Adkins and Lury (1996), who focus on gender and sexuality without retiring either, sexuality was understood as part of the ongoing production of gender. Gender and sexuality were operationalized using the theoretical concept of embodiment (Acker, 1990; Jackson, 1998; Wilton, 1996; Witz et al., 1996). The study did not focus on class, and therefore data collection did not incorporate subjective understandings (social, cultural, and material) of class. Rather, our aim was to gain an understanding of the relationships between gender and occupational hierarchy; that is, we understood there to be a differential power relationship between women and between men and women based on their occupational location in their organization. However, analysis of these qualitative data highlighted the importance of class to the ways in which the women understood their gendered working lives. On reflection, we believe that the study, which included multiple subjectivities of gender and sexuality, would have benefited from an extended focus on class. We made the assumption that different occupational locations were equivalent to different class positions. Consequently, our understanding of class resulted in data that stressed structural differences regarding equity and opportunity and their implications for progression within an organization. Therefore, subjective understandings of class were not pursued. Following Bourdieu (e.g., 1984, 1998, 1999), Savage and colleagues (2001) have emphasized that the social, cultural, and material aspects of class are lived in an individualized and encoded way. This conceptual view of contemporary class identities might provide a useful vehicle for understanding how workers construct their occupational self. Furthermore, the subjective view of class allows the exploration of difference among individuals who share the same

hierarchical location within an organization. However, contemporary theories of class that consider subjectivity are only beginning to address the relations between gender, class, and sexuality (e.g., Skeggs, 2004). In the sections that follow, we focus on subjective elements associated with class and their relation to gender. In particular, we explore Anthias's (2001a, 2001b) concept of social division and Reay's (1997) empirical study, which aims to understand gender and class by drawing on Bourdieu's conceptualizations of habitus and field. Later in the article, we explore the question of incorporating sexuality into analyses of class and gender.

Anthias, a stratification theorist, has explored gender, class, and ethnicity, and has emphasised the need to use the material and the symbolic to achieve a broader understanding of these three concepts (2001a, 2001b). She suggested that class has been understood as material inequality and gender and ethnicity as cultural and symbolic (e.g., identity and difference). Anthias has stressed that class, ethnicity, and gender each have material and symbolic value. She argues for the need to explore the interplay between the symbolic and the material without giving primacy to one or the other. Traditional stratification theory has been founded on the notions that social classes are universal and that gender and ethnicity are additive. Anthias has challenged traditional concepts by suggesting that class is shifting and contextual in nature and that categories derive from symbolic/culture and material processes that shift according to social actors. Consequently, Anthias's work is helpful in providing an alternative view of how class comes together with other social categories by incorporating the material and symbolic within each and by discontinuing class as the core determinant of subjectivity.

Anthias (2001b) has recognized that it is not enough to see gender and class as merely intertwined and has developed a "frame" for delineating social identities and divisions. The frame involves placing social division at the center to allow social divisions to carry equal weight in analyses. She claimed that gender, ethnicity, and class are core social divisions and that other categories might be included. For Anthias, social division constitutes both central classificatory elements in society and systems for allocating social value and positionality. Anthias explained, "If the constructs are read as grids their saliency will not only vary in different contexts but the interplay of the different grids needs always to be considered in any analysis of social outcomes or effects" (2001a, p. 386). Anthias is suggesting the importance of the interplay of a variety of social categories, their context, and outcomes. She does not provide a preconstructed conceptual tool but emphasizes that the reader can classify populations using the three core categories of class, gender, and ethnicity (including any other pertinent social divisions important to the context) and explore social processes, considering the interconnection of multiple social categories and the outcomes of inequality that they produce.

Anthias's (2001a, 2001b) emphasis is on a classificatory process in which to place social divisions. However, she has not addressed how the processes and outcomes of classification might capture patterns and divergences. We suggest that it results in a positivist approach using qualitative data; that is, it forces subjective meanings into categories. By fixing boundaries, there is no room to explore where boundaries blur and, indeed, hear the voices of the participants involved. Consequently, if we had used a classification process in the empirical study on women in the wine industry, we suggest that this would have resulted in the exclusion of data that shed light on difference. For example, a variety of sexual discourses constructed management as male within the narratives (see Halford & Leonard, 2001; Wajcman, 1999, for further discussion). These sexual discourses included the construction of management as "mateship," management as "male," and the requirement that women "manage their femaleness." In discourses about management as "male" and women "managing femaleness," working hours were matched to the "ability to manage." For example, for women to enter and succeed in management, they must comply with the working hours of men despite being primarily responsible for child care. Also evident in some narratives was a resistance to the dominant discourse. There was a belief that if one woman makes it to management, then openings will occur for other women. For example, the role and success of female winemakers is seen as a catalyst for change throughout the company. It is

believed that their success helps all women employees. A participant explained that women's winemaking achievements have given all women in the industry a renewed respect:

Because of their [women's] winemaking achievements and because [winemaking] was a real bastion . . . I think female winemakers have opened up a renewed respect for all females within the industry . . . there are now women doing great things and demanding respect and I think that filters through to the rest.

The women in the wine industry study draws attention to a series of questions regarding what is excluded by a classificatory process. For example, how can a classification process take account of a variety of discourses? Will classification allow for the possibility that subjectivity might relate to more than one discourse or the possibility that participants might choose aspects within a discourse? Furthermore, how can we take account of the possibility that participants might at the same time hold contradictory meanings associated with discourses and simultaneously be resisting and accepting? Unlike Anthias, we suggest that a qualitative approach emphasizing subjectivity does not fit comfortably with such a classificatory approach. Classification inhibits the exploration of the complex nuances of gender and its relation to other social categories.

Habitus, gender, and class

In contrast to the work of Anthias, Reay's work (1997) is empirically based and attempts an investigation of the relationships between gender and class (and race). Her study provides an early feminist interpretation of Bourdieu's (e.g., 1984, 1998, 1999) social theory of practice to explore multiple subjectivities. Bourdieu's key concepts of capital, habitus, and field take the emphasis of class away from the notion of defining it as a measurable and hierarchical category to social and therefore lived phenomena. He illustrated that class has currency in the contemporary world, using examples of the French elite, and demonstrated that class can be understood beyond an economic category. Bourdieu expanded the notion of capital to include a social and cultural dimension; that is, he illustrated that the traditional notion of capital focusing only on the economic-excluded important aspects, such as family, educational attainment, experience, and cultural networks. This expanded notion of capital has provided a methodological tool for researchers to explore the social and cultural as well as economic aspects of the construction of subjective class experience. In brief, Bourdieu's habitus refers to the way in which participants understand and act within their social space; their habitus is informed by their social location and past experiences. A field is "a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital)" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16).

Specifically Reay (1997) used Bourdieu's concept of habitus to analyze the processes underpinning social class practices involving mothers and education. In her qualitative study, she addressed difficult questions about how ambivalence to social class positioning can be understood: "that notions of classlessness, no less than identification of their working or middle-class, inform us about how class is both lived in contemporary society and regulated by discursive orthodoxies" (p. 230). She provided an example of a woman in her study who was unable to define class in the context of her own class position; however, her narrative indicated a class identity and class tension in interacting with the education system. From Reay, we gain an understanding of the interaction of structure and subject, and subjective meanings located in one's past (life history) and social identity. She has demonstrated how individuals internalize class and has shown us that it is not necessary for participants to be explicit about class. This notion of participants' resisting class labels is an important insight within the literature on class and subjectivity (e.g., Savage et al., 2001; Skeggs, 1997).

Reay (1997) has translated habitus into an empirical agenda by suggesting that "it is a method for examining the dynamic relationship between objective constraints and subjective forms of consciousness

in order to understand how class is acted out” (pp. 226-227). The power of her data is that they provide examples of woman’s “sense of powerlessness” and feelings of inferiority when interacting with teachers (p. 229). However, there is limited information in the study about how habitus can be used to understand gender and how gender and class come together to inform women’s social location and subjectivities. Reay’s analysis illustrates the difficulty for researchers in demonstrating the embeddedness of both gender and class in women’s interactions with the educational system.

Embodiment: Gender and sexuality

In Anthias’s (2001a, 2001b) and Reay’s (1997) conceptualizations of gender, there is no mention of sexuality. For a deeper understanding of gender in the workplace, following Wajcman (1999) and Witz and colleagues (1996), we argue that the inclusion of sexuality exposes important aspects of the bodily self and the structures in which people work. However, the question of how to link gender and sexuality in research raises the controversial question of the relationship between gender and sexuality. Butler’s (1990, 1993) work has been influential in questioning the interconnections between gender and sex (as have Delphy, 1993; and Wittig, 1992). For Butler, both gender and sex are constructed through discursive and nondiscursive practices. She has suggested that bodies become gendered and sexed through the continued performance of gender and that women routinely perform particular brands of femininity and men masculinity. However, Butler has been criticized for omitting hierarchical divisions and power. For example, Jackson (1998) has suggested that the social eludes Butler and argued, citing Ramazanoglu, (1995, p. 37) that

the question of where these norms [the gendering of women and men] come from or why they so often produce “heterosexual hegemony,” male dominance or any other imbalance of power does not appear to be an appropriate question to be asked within the logic of her theory. (p. 138)

Jackson is suggesting that by constructing women as a set of cultural categories, women’s experiences vanish, and if gender is treated as a “neutral term denoting social difference,” the hierarchical divisions and power relations among women and men are lost. Adkins and Lury (1996), similarly, have argued that to marginalize gender as a collective category and define it as a cultural phenomenon “more or less exclusively as identity; results in the evacuating of gender as a social and therefore also an economic category” (p. 211). Cultural processes then become reduced to the performance of gender identity.

The question of the causal priority of gender or sexuality remains under debate. The methodological outcome of prioritizing one analytical category over the other has often resulted in the subsuming of gender within the category of sexuality while gender paradigms retire sexuality (Witz et al., 1996). The notion of the “lived body” overcomes the retiring of gender behind sexuality, and vice versa (Acker, 1990; Jackson, 1998; Wilton, 1996; Witz et al., 1996). To “speak to the lived and varied actualities of gender and sexual embodiment” (Jackson, 1998, p. 147) allows for agency by emphasizing the application of cultural inscriptions on the body. Translated to an empirical agenda, the lived body approach requires a qualitative methodology that stresses the analysis of the way in which individuals interpret their multiple social contexts and the different and contradictory meanings generated through specific bodily practices (Corrigan & Meredyth, 1997; Gatens, 1991).

The women in the wine industry study indicated a difference in understanding of bodily self, opportunity to engage in particular work tasks, and regulation of the body at work according to economic and social location within the organization. For example, for women on the factory floor, the body is openly acknowledged at work: eyes watch the bottling lines, backs need to be protected for lifting, and occupational health and safety policies determine differential use of the body for women and men. For example, women reported,

There is no basis for it, from a physical point of view, because you have the occupational health and safety rules and you might be able to lift 50 kilos but you are not allowed to.

Women can't do those things that the men have been doing because it entails stacking cartons and we are only allowed to lift a certain load, and what they are asking us to lift is too high . . . according to occupational health and safety.

Constructing women's bodies as deficient compared to men's via occupational health and safety regulations also limited women's opportunities for advancement (e.g., training and new positions). For example, women wanted to know how machinery operated and were told by management that understanding machinery was not relevant, as they would not be lifting heavy parts. Nevertheless, the women believed that understanding the assembly of machinery is essential to operating it and carrying out their jobs effectively. There are parallels between gendered and sexual bodily constructions of work for women in production (e.g., at the lower end of the hierarchy) and expectations held by the organization about women's knowledge and development of knowledge.

Studies of managerialism have emphasized the importance given to dress and appearance by managers and the organizations in which they work (Wajcman, 1999). Similarly for managerial women in this study, embodiment at work was most achieved in appearance and presentation of the body. For example, women explained,

If you want to be taken seriously, you have to dress seriously and that's it. It's hard enough to be taken seriously [even if] you are doing all that.

If you dress like a tart then you are going to be thought of as a tart and they won't take you seriously and if you dress like a frump they will think of you as a frump and you won't be taken seriously... If you want to be seen as a ballsie woman who's got brains, you have got to dress like it.

These women are focused on the question of "how to create an appearance of wealth and status which conveys authority and power, while de-emphasizing sexuality" (Wajcman, 1999, p. 111). At the same time, the use of the term "ballsie" suggests a representation of male sexuality and its relation to power. Furthermore, it suggests an interpretation of male sexuality within a female form; that is, women recognize the need to acquire the attributes of male sexuality and deemphasize female sexuality through dress.

For women in production, the "mothering body" was overtly presented in the workplace. For these women, their working hours and shifts were constructed around child care needs. Furthermore, the regulation of workplace procedures for use of machinery reflected the protection of the mothering body and the reproducing body.

In contrast to women in production, managerial women hid their mothering bodies. Managerial women actively concealed aspects of motherhood. For example, women did not raise issues with senior managers regarding flexible working hours and child care responsibilities. They also used maternity provisions in very limited ways, as they feared they would not have the same opportunities on return to work (e.g., not being able to return to the same job and/or alter future working hours). A woman manager explained,

I would love to pursue something, at some stage where I could have maybe . . . a four day week with less pay . . . but I don't think just from what I've sort of investigated here we are not at that level yet . . . we are not up to date with sort of dealing with women's needs.

Incorporating class into theories of embodiment

Many of the studies focused on gender and sexuality via embodiment give little if any attention to class (e.g., Butler, 1990; Corrigan & Meredyth, 1997; Witz et al., 1996). We have highlighted that the prioritizing of gender and sexuality has often resulted in the subsuming of gender within the category of sexuality or retiring sexuality within gender paradigms. We argue equally that studies of gender and class either subsume class or retire gender. Authors such as Jackson (1996), Ramazanoglu (1995), and Adkins (1995) have considered the connections between gender, sexuality, and economic and social position (rather than class). For these authors, the inclusion of the economic and social position of women and men broadens the category of gender and sexuality beyond the cultural. We suggest that by introducing subjective aspects of class to an empirical study of gender and sexuality, the study would have been better able to articulate the economic and social with the cultural to illuminate these social categories. The benefit of embodiment as a concept is that it allows the bringing together of multiple social categories in the context of both structure and agency. Embodiment allows for an exploration of the economic, social, and cultural across and within social categories. It also allows us to go beyond classification to explore complexity and give depth. However, a limitation of the concept of embodiment is that it provides a view of the self through bodily practice(s), and at times aspects of the self might be manifested in ways that cannot be captured by a specific bodily practice alone. For example, in the case of class, subjective meanings might be tied closely to life history. Reay's 1997 empirical study illustrates how past experiences and one's life histories are integral to how women understand contemporary classed experiences. Using embodiment exclusively as a methodological tool disallows the emergence of a detailed life history, which allows an understanding of class (e.g., Savage et al., 2001). We have shown in our data that embodiment differs according to social location within the organization. We have shown specific bodily practices associated with hierarchical location. However, what is not evident is the subjective meanings regarding the cultural, economic, and social associated with what class means and how it is lived.

Developing the links between class, gender, and sexuality: What does this mean for empirical methodologies?

The choice of method and research design influences the opportunity to explore the construction of class, gender, and sexuality. Anthias (2001a, 2001b) has drawn our attention to the interplay between the material and the symbolic in constituting social categories. Consequently, an empirical study requires a qualitative component that (a) moves beyond typologies and (b) links its questioning and analysis to the material and symbolic. Furthermore, Anthias underscored that class can easily dominate theoretical and empirical studies and argued that other social categories should not be additive but instead hold equal value. Following Reay (1997) and others (Savage et al., 2001), we recognize the potential of using a life history method to allow interviewees to reflect on past and present experiences, interpretations of experiences and events, emotions, and cognitive interactions within everyday social practice in developing an understanding of self or selves. Life histories seek to "examine and analyse the subjective experience of individuals and their construction of the social world" (Jones, 1983, cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 121). There are multiple approaches to obtaining life histories (See Coles & Knowles, 2001; Ritchie, 1994), and in this article, we do not advocate a particular approach. In general, life history approaches provide opportunities for researchers to conduct multiple interviews with interviewees. Multiple interviews allow time, space, and trust to be incorporated into the interview process. We are suggesting that this is vital to creating a reflexive space in which the interviewee may express memories about the self that might be fragmented and complex. Life histories are useful in emphasizing how participants create meaning within a culture. They might also help capture the evolution of cultural patterns and how these patterns are linked to the life of a participant (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Life histories need not be static and portray a linear life pattern; used openly, they provide the potential to

allow participants to explore complex and conflicting experiences. They also allow an investigation of shifting and fragmented meanings about self over time, which, as Reay has indicated, is important for capturing subjectivities. Savage and colleagues (2001) have also argued, “Respondents talk about class identity in terms of a life history...Class provides a set of external anchors for the individual and hence it is quite compatible with telling a life history” (p. 883). Although life histories have the potential to uncover multiple subjectivities, at the same time they only “give the interviewee enough time to relate what both the interviewer seeks and the interviewee wants to tell” (Ritchie, 1994, p. 16).

We contend that a more powerful theoretical and methodological approach for studies involving multiple social categories in the workplace is the combining of a life history approach with theories of embodiment. The use of the combination of embodiment and a life history approach encourages the exploration of both the symbolic and the material bases to class, gender, and sexuality. In the discussion above, we have indicated ways to explore symbolic meanings associated with class, gender, and sexuality. Here, we argue that the method needs to incorporate the link between the symbolic and the material (and vice versa). For example, the data presented earlier in this article from the women in the wine industry study linked the material and the symbolic in its exploration of the regulation of the body at work. The data demonstrated cultural meanings associated with occupational health and safety and the restriction of training, and therefore career opportunities and economic advancement for women. The narratives of women in the wine industry also highlighted women’s interpretation of organizational culture and policy about motherhood. Furthermore, they showed the impact of policy and culture on economic opportunities to pursue a career in management and the difficulties that all women experienced in negotiating hours of employment.

Life histories extend the methodological scope provided by theories of embodiment. Theories of embodiment allow, and, indeed, drive, the research toward a focus on specific tasks and processes that are gendered, sexual, and classed. For example, the women in the wine industry research focused on specific aspects of bodily practice in the workplace, such as tasks, language about the body, and organizational policies and culture. Thus, data produced from workplace studies using the concept of embodiment are often focused on similar aspects of the workplace and emphasize the present. They emphasize how the here and now influences work practices and bodily meanings. The combination of a life history approach with embodiment allows for an exploration of the past as well as the present without retiring either. The combination of approaches is likely to produce data that have the potential to show the construction and reconstruction of gender, sexuality, and class at work. They also have the potential to show and contextualize the fragmentation of meanings about the self. If an empirical study emphasizes the present without including life experience, over time it is likely that the complexity and contradictions in meanings associated with gender, sexuality, and class might not emerge in narratives. As well, contextualizing working life provides an opportunity to draw out divergences in meanings and experiences for participants who share the same social and economic location in the organization.

In conclusion

In this article, we have used the work of Anthias (2001a, 2001b) and Reay (1997) as examples of contemporary work focused on multiple social categories and their relation to each other. We have argued that although Reay’s empirical work and Anthias’s concept of social division provide important insights, neither adequately explores the complexity and intersections between social categories. In response to limited attention on empirical interrelationships between social categories, we have in this article developed one qualitative methodological approach to enable the further development of gender, sexuality, and class in the lives of subjects. Our methodological approach is derived from reflections on our empirical study of women in the wine industry. We have argued for the combining of life histories with theories of embodiment to encourage equal positioning of gender, sexuality, and class and to allow for the economic, social, and cultural to be expressed within and across social categories. We emphasize

that the methodological approach presented in this article is one approach and that the complexity of subjectivity might require various methods and theories depending on the context and focus of the particular study. In other words, we are not attempting to provide a panacea to overcome the retiring or subsuming of one social category behind another, nor do we attempt to present a framework that will neatly capture gender, sexuality, and class.

We have highlighted limitations of theories of embodiment and, in particular, their focus on present action and thought. Following contemporary writers concerned with class and subjectivity, who have demonstrated the importance of past experience in the construction and reconstruction of subjectivities, we incorporate life histories to capture past experience and complement theories of embodiment. Life history and embodiment translated to a methodological approach that enabled the emergence in narratives of how and in what context multiple social categories intersect or fuse. They allow for the opening up of research design, data collection, and analyses of gender, sexuality, and class to facilitate the uncovering of situations, contexts, and meanings where gender, sexuality, and class intersect in the lives of subjects. Furthermore, they permit gender, class, and sexuality to come together in experience(s), and they allow consideration of the contexts in which gendered, classed, and sexual meanings empirically “meld.” What is now required is further empirical study to explore the question of the melding of social categories to advance theoretical developments around subjectivity.

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