

# University of Galway Research Repository

## Beyond ourselves: Passion and the dark side of identification in an ethical organization

Title	Beyond ourselves: Passion and the dark side of identification in an ethical organization
Author(s)	Kenny, Kate
Publication Date	2010-03-19
Publication information	Kenny, K. M. (2010). Beyond ourselves: Passion and the dark side of identification in an ethical organization. <i>Human Relations</i> , 63(6), 857–873. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726709345042">https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726709345042</a>
Link to publisher's version	<a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0018726709345042">http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0018726709345042</a>
Item record	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10379/2698">http://hdl.handle.net/10379/2698</a>

# Beyond ourselves: Passion and the dark side of identification in an ethical organization

Human Relations  
XX(X) 1–17  
© The Author(s) 2010  
Reprints and permission: [sagepub.  
co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav](http://sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav)  
DOI: 10.1177/0018726709345042  
<http://hum.sagepub.com>  


**Kate M Kenny**

National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland

## Abstract

How are organizational discourses enacted by people at work? In this article, instead of treating subjects as somewhat distinct from such discourses, I argue that the two are inescapably intertwined. The concept of 'ek-stasis' helps us to understand this. Ek-stasis invokes an idea of the 'self' that, through processes of identification, is always located outside of itself, embedded in a wider sociality. I explore this dynamic through an in-depth study of the powerful discourse of 'ethical living', and its enactment in one contemporary development sector organization, EWH. This ek-static enactment was somewhat ambivalent: involving mutual recognition between colleagues, but also processes of exclusion and policing. I highlight how attention to feeling and passion was important in understanding the relation between workplace discourse and identification processes, in this setting. This study shows that a view of workplace selves as ek-static is useful for understanding the enactment of discourse at work, and that this enactment can be both passionate and ambivalent.

## Keywords

gender theory, identification, identity, organization studies, participant observation, passion, sociology, subjection

## Introduction

For the last 20 years, organization researchers have been fascinated with the relationship between workplace discourse and peoples' identity work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). A key concept involves the way in which dominant workplace discourses are upheld

---

### Corresponding author:

Kate M Kenny, National University of Ireland, School of Political Science and Sociology, University Road, Galway, Ireland.

Email: [kate.kenny@nuigalway.ie](mailto:kate.kenny@nuigalway.ie)

through processes of identification by employees (Knights and Willmott, 1989). This idea draws largely on the poststructuralist notion of subjection and Michel Foucault's theorization of power (Grant et al., 1998). For Foucault, discourse is best conceived of as constituted by the multiple and disparate activity of local actors: discourse is produced by the identification processes of a myriad of subjects (Foucault, 1982). In turn, identification processes are inscribed by discursive power. A problem persists in recent appropriations of these ideas within organization theory however; studies tend to treat the identification process, and the operation of discourse, as empirically, analytically and theoretically separate (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000). The question remains as to how we might better understand these two 'levels' as mutually intertwined: in a continuous process of co-constitution. This would help a deeper appreciation of the subtle and complex ways in which power is enacted at the level of the subject (Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994). How can we think about our own identifications, and the ways these relate to wider forms of power and knowledge, without falling back into something of a binary, with our 'selves' at one pole, and powerful discourses at another? The problem is that the 'analytic tools' available to authors remain somewhat anaemic for these purposes (Thomas and Davies, 2005). Authors have called for a more nuanced way of 'problematizing this binary' and portraying identification and discourse as intertwined, while remaining true to Foucault's ideas (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

In order to attain a more nuanced conception of this relation between subject and discourse, one approach in organization studies has been to draw upon and extend Hegel's concept of intersubjectivity, either directly (Hancock and Tyler, 2001), or drawing on other writers who adopt a Hegelian perspective, including Lacan (Jones and Spicer, 2005; Roberts, 2005), Butler (Borgerson, 2005; Harding, 2003) and Lefebvre (Ford and Harding, 2004). For Hegel, the self is inscribed with a primary enthrallment with the Other, which secures the self's existence. The other is thus both implicated in, and constitutive of, the self. As an illustration of this, although Ford and Harding (2004) began their investigation of perceptions of place and space at work by thinking of the hospital they studied as 'an organization (that was) made up out of the subjectivities of its members' (2004: 828), in their subsequent analysis, they were led to revise the dualism underscoring this initial assumption. Studying the narratives of workers and managers, the authors could not find a clear distinction between the organization and the people who worked there. Instead, they found a hospital made up of 'people and spaces inscribed upon, collapsed into, defined by and constitutive of psyches and bodies' (2004: 828). Thus, the intuitive and commonplace distinction between subject and the 'discursive structure' of hospital was 'collapsed'. Ford and Harding found Lefebvre's Hegelian understanding of the interaction between subject and space to be helpful in understanding this.

In this article, I draw out Butler's theorization of this relation, which she develops against a backdrop of poststructuralism and psychoanalysis (Butler, 1997). Building on Foucault's work, she sees discourse as an outcome of the practices of a myriad of others. Such power is implicated in the formation of the subject, which, for Butler, leads to the idea that subject and 'other' are inescapably intertwined. In what follows, I first discuss her concept of 'ek-stasis' and show how it relates to the study of identification at work (Butler, 1993, 1997). Next, I describe the case study organization, EWH<sup>1</sup>, in which a discourse of ethical living prevailed. This discourse was maintained through processes of

recognition and exclusion. This article builds on existing studies by providing an in-depth account of ek-stasis at work. A further contribution is to argue for the value of the concept of passionate attachment for understanding workplace identification processes. I conclude by discussing some implications of ek-static identification for organization theory and research.

### *Butler's ek-static subject*

Butler's account of identification draws on psychoanalytic concepts, a Foucauldian view of power, and a Hegelian notion of ekstasis. For Stuart Hall, it represents one of the most convincing and 'rigorously argued' approaches to identification in contemporary social theory (Hall, 2000: 28).

Butler's ek-static subject is one whose psyche is inscribed by 'societal' norms. For example, while a person might assume that she or he 'is' a particular gender, implying that gender is a feature of that *person*, in fact 'the terms that make up one's own gender are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author' (Butler, 2004: 1). Despite their 'outside' nature, the subject is inescapably attached to these terms because it desires, and requires, recognition by an other, or a set of others. When, however, a subject finds that they are outside of a dominant social norm, for example, 'the terms that make up one's own gender', at a given point in time, this is experienced as abjection. If we cannot be recognized as legitimate human beings in the terms offered to us by a wider sociality, if we fall outside of the norm, then 'we are not possible beings; we have been foreclosed from possibility' (Butler, 2004: 31). In order to avoid this abjection, the desire for recognition is a powerful one, and causes people to subject themselves to existing normative frameworks, even where this subjection is hurtful (Butler, 1993). Identification can thus be bittersweet: 'called by an injurious name, I come into social being . . . I am led to embrace the terms that injure me because they constitute me socially' (Butler, 1997: 104). Our identifications are therefore ambivalent, and involve both valuable recognition and painful abjection (Ford and Harding, 2004; Lloyd, 1998). In this way, aspects of life that might have been associated with the *outside* – the social or the political – operate in a space we might have previously thought of as internal. To attain the position of subject, and be recognized as such, is to be 'cast, always, outside oneself, Other to oneself', through psychic processes of desire (Butler, 2004: 148, 1997). For these reasons, we are not the authors of our own identifications but always outside of ourselves, embedded in the sociality which provides us with, to put it simplistically, normative injunctions of how to behave, and what to identify with.

Related to this, we can see that the process of subject formation is an exclusionary one, because it involves producing a 'domain of abject beings' (Butler, 1993: 3). These abject beings are not themselves accorded the status of subject, but they are nonetheless needed to 'form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject' in question (Butler, 1993: 3). These abject others are relegated to a 'zone of uninhabitability': an unthinkable space that itself constitutes a 'site of dreaded identification' for the subject (1993: 3). It is around this abject site of otherness that the subject circumscribes its own 'claim to autonomy and to life' (Butler, 1993: 3). In addition, psychoanalytic processes such as melancholia, can lead to this repudiation by the subject to be turned back upon the

subject itself: the subject can experience *itself* as object (Butler, 1990). If, in seeking a reflection of ourselves in another, we find nothing, we are rendered other to ourselves (Borgerson, 2005).

For Butler, the repudiations and recognitions that render us embedded in the other can be usefully conceived of as passionate attachments. We hold the potential to ‘undo each other’, in the ongoing drama of identification and abjection, and this undoing is evident in the passions by which we experience social life. As children we realize that ‘there is no possibility of not loving, where love is bound up with the requirements of life’; we are bound to each other in passionate ways (Butler, 1997: 8). Butler argues that the subject ‘responds to reflections of itself in *emotional* ways, according to whether that reflection signifies a diminution or augmentation of its own possibility of future persistence and life’ (Butler, 2004: 235, emphasis added). When seeking to understand how identification links us to those around us, and to power, Butler calls for an attentiveness to these ‘emotional ways’: to the ‘passion and grief and rage we feel, all of which tear us from ourselves, bind us to others, transport us, undo us, and implicate us in lives that are not our own, sometimes fatally, irreversibly’ (Butler, 2004: 20).

The question remains as to how to understand what this ‘desiring subject’ consists of. For Butler, there is no subject that exists prior to its subjection to power; processes of desire are implicated in the very formation of the subject: ‘power that at first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject’s self-identity’ (1997: 3). Following Foucault (1981), Butler considers the ‘self’ to be a problematic category of analysis. What we take to be our ‘private selves’ may be the illusion of an interior space, and to focus on it is politically dangerous, as it distracts from the workings of power on the larger scale (Butler, 1990). If this is the case, however, what is it that *does* the desiring, and enacts the subject position? To understand how this psychic subjection works, Butler uses the metaphor of the ‘trope’, or turn. The subject marks the point at which power turns back upon itself; the subject’s conscience emerges as a *fabricated* ‘effect of an internalized prohibition’ (1997: 22). This ‘turns “the drive” back on itself, fabricating an internal sphere, the condition for self-inspection and reflexivity’ (1997: 22). Importantly, Butler is unclear about the origins of this drive, of ‘whether the doubling back upon itself is performed by primary longings, desires or drives’ (1997: 22). However, for her, it doesn’t matter; the point to note is that the conscience that emerges from the resulting psychic processes of self-beratement has effects because it ties the subject to the power that constitutes it. She goes into detail about how conscience, guilt, mourning and melancholia are all evidence of this phenomenon of the subject becoming an object for itself to regard, examine and punish: it is here that the *feelings* she refers to, emerge in the subject. The subject is therefore ‘the effect of power in recoil’, and remains in a continuous process of constitution (Butler, 1997: 6). Butler acknowledges that her position with regards to the ‘origins’ of subjection is indeed vague; the ‘ontological status’ of this ‘founding moment . . . remains permanently uncertain’ (1997: 3). She also admits the difficulty of this notion, noting that it doesn’t offer a definitive explanation of ‘what or who is said to turn, and what is the object of such a turn?’ (1997: 4). However, it is valuable to accept this temporal paradox and to work with it, to know that when speaking about subject, or power, we are referring ‘to what does not yet exist’ (1997: 4). If we can suspend our ontological

commitments for the moment, we can draw on the paradox and appreciate the complexity without insisting on unpacking it into our own, pre-existing categories.

The notion that our identifications are premised on a desire for recognition from others is not new within social theory (see for example, Honneth, 1995 and Taylor, 1994). Nor is the idea that we create abject others by the exclusionary practices that secure our self-identity (Said, 1978). However, previous approaches tend to invoke unhelpful binary notions of ‘self’ and ‘other’ (or society), which are distinct from each other (Alexander and Smith, 1993). The ‘I’ that seeks recognition is seen to be quite apart from the other that bestows it, and this difference can have ethical consequences. For example, the subject-object separation has implications for the ways in which social researchers (a collection of ‘I’s) represent those we research (a collection of ‘others’ we have ontological control over), in our journal articles and books (Lutz, 1988; Roberts, 2005). In contrast, as detailed above, Butler’s psychoanalytic and post-structural concept of ek-stasis provides a picture of identification in which the self-other dichotomy is problematized (Butler, 1997). Moreover, for Butler, the ek-static self is never the same at two points in time (Butler, 2004). The self is transformed through its encounter with the other, and is therefore always ‘at a temporal remove from its former appearance’ (2004: 148). This does not mean that the self is continually changing and shifting, unrecognizable from one moment to the next. Rather, the psyche can be seen as a ‘congealment’ of layers of experiences and losses, which colour, but which do not determine, future conditions (1997: 169). Even so, an element of unknowingness does persist in the laying down of these layers. When a self encounters an other; in the case of each, ‘difference casts it forth into an irreversible future’ (2004: 148). In her later work, Butler argues that this has ethical implications for the ways in which we think about those upon whom we depend for our sense of validity (Borgerson, 2005); the subject is *not* in control but finds itself continually constituted by an other whose ‘history . . . does not have oneself at its centre’ (Butler, 2004; 146). The subject is therefore no longer in a position of dominance.

In summary, ek-stasis refers to a self that is located outside of itself, in a wider sociality. The processes of identification that attend this location involve both recognition and repudiation, and are continually in process. Butler refers to this embeddedness of self in other as passionate attachment, and argues that the concept can help us to better understand processes of identification. In this article, I would like to build on the work of other authors (Ford and Harding, 2004), and ask whether this notion of an ek-static self might be a useful contribution to debates on workplace identification (Borgerson, 2005). I draw upon a recent participant observation study of a UK development sector organization, focusing on a discourse of *ethical living* to investigate this. I find that its day-to-day enactment was premised upon mutual recognition, but also upon a form of policing, which was accompanied by exclusion, and by pain.

## Case and method

### *Background to EWH*

EWH had been set up in 2001, with the aim of using Internet technology to help bridge the ‘digital divide’ between rich and poor. The organization was founded by two friends,

Derek and Mark, both of whom had decided to leave well-paid positions in the IT sector in order to work towards helping less well-off people. They were soon joined by Roger, a successful project manager, and John, who was well-connected in the aid and development sectors. By the time the research for this article began, in April 2004, EWH had achieved charitable status and had successfully applied for funding from a large UK government donor, UKD. This funding was to finance a pilot study in Kenya, which would investigate how IT could help impoverished regions. I carried out participant observation for the nine-month period of the UKD project. Every morning, on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, I would cycle to the 'office': a converted shed attached to a University department that had been donated by one of John's contacts in the institution. I would remain from nine until approximately six in the evening. In return for access, I carried out small pieces of background research on countries and regions that EWH intended to visit as part of the UKD project. I spent much of the day at my laptop, sitting among EWH staff and volunteers. The team got together for an hour each day for lunch around the battered, wooden table; management had decided that providing a free meal was a good way of repaying the volunteer staff. Lunches were boisterous and noisy occasions, with conversation topics ranging from the benefits of cycling over car use, the advantages of living in housing co-operatives, and the upcoming move within the United Kingdom to introduce mandatory identification cards. I was invited to attend meetings with leading non-governmental organizations and with the donor organization, UKD. In November 2004, I accompanied the team on a six-week research visit to Kenya. After nine months, the UKD project had come to an end, I was keen to begin writing up my findings, and so the research period finished.

The EWH team was relatively small, consisting of a core group of paid staff; CEO Derek, Chairman John, Chief Technology officer Roger and Chief Engineer Mark. Another paid member, Emily, joined five months after the study commenced. In addition, EWH comprised a number of volunteers including Sally, Dan and Lizzy. All were aged between 22 and 32 and all had been to university and earned degrees in areas other than development. Most were male, with Margaret, Sally and Emily being the only women. Dress code was very informal, with some members adopting a kind of 'field uniform': wearing the sandals, loose cotton trousers and aid agency t-shirts that would be more suited to a field visit to Sudan, than to April in the south of England.

### *Data collection*

I used a multi-method approach to studying the interaction of identification processes and workplace discourse at EWH (Eisenhardt, 1989). My main source of data came from participant observation, which has proved useful in similar studies (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Kondo, 1990). Participant observation enables a focus upon the less overt aspects of organizational life, including the jokes, the complaints and the arguments that can prove valuable for studying a phenomenon as 'local' as identification at work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). I recorded fieldnotes in notebooks during the day, and typed them up at night upon returning home from the office (Schultze, 2000). Computer work is relatively quiet and so most of my notes pertain to the times when the team were doing other things together; eating lunch, holding team meetings and



travelling (Schultze, 2000). I augmented this participant observation with a series of semi-structured interviews with each member of EWH. These were carried out at the start and at the end of the nine-month study and lasted about an hour each. Interviews were recorded for later transcription. I also gathered meeting minutes, emails, photographs and intranet pages. All data was converted into electronic form where possible.

### *Data analysis*

Following similar studies of workplace identification, I was interested in how people at EWH spoke about themselves in relation to their experiences of the organization (Halford and Leonard, 2005; Pratt, 2000). Analysis began by reading my data transcriptions closely, isolating instances of self-reference by members of the team. Following a process of open coding, I identified common themes (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Naturally, multiple discourses relate to processes of identification in any given workplace (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). I chose to focus upon the ethical living discourse because it emerged as one that was at once dominant, surprising (Davis, 1971) and of potential interest to other organization studies researchers (Pratt, 2000). In this case, ethical living is conceived of as a *local* construction, specific to EWH (Symon, 2005). This 'close-range' approach to discourse enables richer insights into the operation of power and identification (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000: 1134; Geertz, 1973). Having identified the discourse and its constitutive tropes, I traced this theme chronologically through the data, to see how it was enacted over time (Kondo, 1990; Maitlis and Ozelik, 2004). While working at EWH, I naturally found myself 'analysing' the case on an ongoing basis: playing with different perspectives for understanding what I was experiencing (Schultze, 2000), and moving back and forth between the data and theories I was reading (Karreman and Alvesson, 2004). At EWH, the ongoing enactment of discourse through mundane practices (Roberts, 2005), along with the significant overlap between team members' 'personal' perspectives and values, and the discourse of 'ethical living' being studied, implied a blurring of the boundaries between these concepts. Butler's concept of ek-stasis appeared to help understand this. In writing this account, I aim to weave the theoretical discussion throughout the results in order to capture the complexity of identification processes that I observed at EWH (Kondo, 1990).

As mentioned earlier, the persistence of the 'self versus other' binary in contemporary ways of knowing, contributes to an assumption of separation out between researcher and 'researched' (Lutz, 1988; Roberts, 2005). This separation can lead to the researcher assuming a position of dominance over the 'other' that he or she is researching, which manifests itself in many ways. These include the language we use to describe our 'subjects' (Marshak et al., 2000; Wray-Bliss, 2003) and the scenes we select worthy of reporting. For example, my decision to focus on the discourse of ethical living is most likely coloured by my previous employments (in software and engineering firms), in which such a discourse was definitely *not* present. I was fascinated by the power of this discourse within EWH. Reflecting on this study, it appears that participant observation lessens the degree to which researcher can remain separate, and dominant. My nine months with EWH involved a lot of close contact between myself and those I worked with. I wondered who was dominating whom when, for example, I found myself laid up in a



hospital isolation ward after contracting bacterial diseases during the research visit to Kenya, or when I would arrive home at eleven p.m., exhausted, from donor meetings in London. Reflecting on this, I acknowledge that my presence at EWH inevitably involved co-constitution of subjectivity between myself and my 'colleagues' (Wray-Bliss, 2003), as is made clear further on. In order to reflect the engaged nature of this process, I have attempted to write myself into the account that follows, and to paint a picture of my own subject position as researcher (Dick and Cassell, 2002; Symon, 2005; Walsham, 1995).

## Ethical living at work

The case of EWH is ideal for studying the ways in which subject and discourse are intertwined: cases of organizations where the connection between employees' sense of self and dominant normative discourses are unusually strong have, to date, proved valuable for understanding workplace identification (Grey 1994; Kunda, 1992). This article provides an illustration of similar extremes. While workplaces are necessarily fraught with multiple and heterogeneous ways of viewing the world (Kondo, 1990), there was a surprisingly *shared* perspective within EWH. For the purpose of analysis and discussion, this perspective is conceptualized as a discourse of 'ethical living'. Given the local focus of this discourse, ethical living at EWH meant an eco-friendly, vegetarian and vaguely left-wing approach to food, politics and the environment. My analysis yields some surprising aspects of the enactment of this discourse. While ethical living was premised on an open, inclusive environment in which staff recognized each other as ethical, it was, at the same time, upheld by a somewhat exclusive and punitive process of *policing*. Exclusion of ethically *unsound* others, both within and outside of the organization, accompanied the ongoing constitution of selves as ethically sound. Moreover, these recognitions and exclusions were experienced as passions. To illustrate ethical living at EWH, I draw out two aspects of this pervasive discourse as it was enacted at the organization: an orientation towards food (which should be fair-trade, vegan and organic) and organization (which should be as open and democratic as possible).

### Ethical food

As mentioned previously, noisy daily lunches provided useful opportunities to gain insight into EWH life. A common orientation towards *food* was evident at EWH. As chief engineer Mark noted, when asked about aspects of organizational life that were shared:

What I would say is universal is that I think we all care about the environment and we all try and buy foods that are not too damaging to the environment like organic food. We tend to shop from cooperatives, which are more inclined to fair trade. Even those of us who aren't prepared to go as far as being vegetarian or vegan still go a long way. (Mark, interview, 22 April 2005)

Shared views on food included the idea that fair-trade produce was important: the coffee and chocolate that appeared on the EWH lunch table were invariably branded fair-trade. Organic vegetables and houmous were daily staples, and were considered far superior to non-organic produce. Team members also shared strong views on whether animals

should be eaten; it was generally agreed that this was ethically problematic. Apart from three people, staff and volunteers were either vegetarian or vegan. Smoked tofu and soya milk were regular features, and conversations often centred on whether particular foods could be considered fully vegan or not.

The choice of what food to consume was more than a matter of preference or taste for those working at EWH; food was an ethical issue. Team members espoused a concern for the impact that their lifestyles would have on the world around them, and food was an important way of managing that impact. As Dan mentioned:

I've made a large effort over the past say six years to work out what I am doing in many areas of my life: in terms of what I do, what I consume, what I am buying, how I am spending my time, where I'm living . . . the kinds of organizations I am involved in, the type of people I am associating with, my lifestyle choices, the whole thing. I don't get the impression that the world is in a particularly good state and I am really interested to understand my interaction with it . . . on a daily level, on a lifetime level. (Dan, interview, 26 April 2004)

This impression that the world is not 'in a particularly good state' was shared by Dan's colleagues. The role that people at EWH might play in changing this was a common discussion topic, with consumption choices being perceived as a medium for achieving such change. Buying, preparing and eating food was a way of putting one's personal ethical position into action. This was not always easy; the organic food was expensive, either supplied from health food stores or from an up-market supermarket chain that delivered to the office door. The food bills at EWH were relatively high, particularly in the context of a non-profit, volunteering organization that found itself regularly running low on funds. In addition, finding vegan food to eat every day was inconvenient and involved time and effort. The effort invested by team members highlights the importance of food at EWH. Moreover, the fact that this effort was shared, shows how the small and mundane practice of eating lunch was a means for staff members to enact 'personal' processes of identification, through 'organizational' practices such as daily lunch. The personal was thus encouraged and facilitated with the help of the rest of the team, for example, when conversation turned to questions of where the best vegan food might be bought.

Interestingly, this enactment was ongoing, and was subject to change and to iteration over time. Personal choices that related to food were often discussed with one's colleagues, and these discussions were central to peoples' decisions. For example, over the nine-months I spent at the organization, two of my colleagues who had previously eaten meat decided to switch to a vegetarian diet, and one chose to become vegan. Such decisions were celebrated and, as indicated in the quote earlier, accompanied with advice on how this new lifestyle could be managed:

I got to the kitchen late for the weekly (meeting) . . . I could hear Sally as I came in the door; 'Do you think Rice Crispies are vegan?' . . . followed by laughs all round. (Field notes, 6 October 2004)

This piece of workplace banter was typical of lunchtime conversation, and reflects the involvement of the whole group in one person's decision to change her lifestyle, through

changing her eating habits. As mentioned earlier by Dan, it is clear that conversations at lunch were a key way of understanding one's 'interaction' with the world. For example, the paradoxes inherent to ethical consumption were frequently discussed:

'More chat at lunch about soya and its role in deforestation in Brazil . . . 'It's so hard to know what is good/ethical to eat these days', said someone. (Field notes, 26 July 2004)

Dilemmas such as this one were regular sources of debate at lunch, where the entire group was called upon to resolve a 'personal' ethical question. Choices around the consumption of food, whether these involved opting to eat soy, converting to vegetarianism, or cycling to the health-food store en route to work, were means by which peoples' ethics could be 'lived', and being a member of EWH was central to this. Moreover, the 'living' itself informed the ways in which the discourse played out. These examples show how the discourse of ethical living was acted out over time at EWH; it was enacted through conversations such as those described earlier, and the resulting decisions by staff members.

### *Ethical organization*

In addition to food politics, the ethical living discourse extended into the way in which EWH was organized. Again, a shared perspective on the world was clearly in evidence: this time it incorporated an ethos of openness and democracy with regard to how organizations should be run.

Many people in EWH had previously worked for organizations in which they had not been allowed to participate in important decisions, and this had rendered them frustrated. In daily conversation, and in research interviews, staff members frequently contrasted such experiences against their perception of EWH, which appeared all the more appealing for its democratic structures. For example, when volunteer Dan spoke about his career path to date, he referred to his previous job as 'absolutely soul destroying . . . it was pretty grim; it was a pretty depressing, stressful situation. I couldn't wait to get out of the place but they found a "niche" for me and so I couldn't get redundancy . . . Bastards' (Dan, interview, 26 April 2005). Dan's firm had provided products for the military and had not listened when he asked to not be part of this. When his stand-off finally led to his redundancy, Dan was able to join EWH full-time, and he joked that he was 'so happy, I could hug a tree!' (Dan, Email, 4 September 2004). Similarly, Lizzy's software firm had opaque and questionable management practices. It was, in her view, 'quite a nasty company' in which there was a high turnover of staff because the practices of the organization did not take workers' views into account: 'they didn't have an ethical mindset as to how they treated their customers or employees' (Lizzy, interview, 21 April 2005). This situation stood in stark contrast to the open, inclusive atmosphere that she found at EWH. As with the approach to food above, this shared perspective closely matched the 'personal' views and values that the majority of the team reported to have held, even prior to joining the organization:

We are not just here to work. There are other aspects of life too that we share, that are positive. It's good to be feeling that way. (Dan, interview, 26 April 2005)

These other aspects included views on how organizations should be run. Again, this personal stance was reflected by daily organizational practices, in a number of ways. For example, the importance of openness and democracy was manifested in the ‘Weekly Hugs’. These were Wednesday meetings during which the management team consulted the rest of the organization about different changes that had occurred, plans that were being discussed and other relevant issues. At the Hug, the team would debate these, openly and informally. For Lizzy, these hugs represented valuable transparency in how the organization was run:

Everybody has the opportunity at least to know what’s going on . . . and the way things are going and what EWH is planning to do. It’s all quite open and it’s not a big secret; it’s not kind of left up to the management. I mean they make the decisions but they are quite happy to hear your views on why we should go one way rather than another. (Lizzy, interview, 21 April 2005)

As Lizzy describes, all staff, even younger volunteers, reported that they felt able to openly debate with, and criticize, members of the management team. The ethos of openness, fairness and democracy manifest in the Weekly Hug was in evidence in the ways in which the hierarchy within EWH was maintained. For example, Sally was asked why, given a number of issues that she was having with her role in this organization, she continued to work there:

‘And people *care* . . . Like, I mightn’t completely agree with Mark all the time, bless him, I don’t know how he manages to do it but we always argue about everything. And Roger as well, like we have quite different opinions about it . . . but we, we fucking passionately *care* about what we are trying to say! And we will drink and argue it out until its beaten to death and that’s . . . Ah its so stimulating, its fantastic. (Sally, interview, 10 May 2004)

Sally’s comment shows how important it is for her, as for Lizzy and Dan, that her personal views on the value of open debate be shared by her colleagues. For team members, an ethical life was one in which a primacy was placed upon openness and democracy, and this was practiced as part of the working day at EWH. These examples show how the personal (the identification) and the social (the ongoing discourse of ethical living) were somewhat inseparable at EWH: the subject found itself ‘outside of itself’ (Ford and Harding, 2004). The lunches and the weekly hugs were forums for inclusiveness, where people *recognized* each other for living ethically: as valid members of EWH. There was a sense that members of the organization had at last found a place where their personal politics were shared by their colleagues. As Lizzy noted, ‘the people at EWH *want* to be at EWH, whether they are paid or not’ (Lizzy, interview, 21 April 2005). Understanding the enactment of ethical living would not be helped by constructing an analytic dichotomy between the two levels; it is difficult to see how we might separate out subject from discourse. ‘Individual’ practices of ethical living were enacted *with* others. Moreover, the discourse was continually enacted and performed through such processes of identification (Butler, 1990; Hodgson, 2005). Through day-to-day practices at work, EWH was continually becoming the kind of ethical living organization that I experienced it to be. The relation between processes of identification and workplace discourse at EWH

reflects Butler's idea of 'ek-stasis', an inescapable relation to the Other in which the subject is 'beyond itself from the start' (Butler, 2004: 150).

### *Policing the norm: Abjection*

EWH was a place where people felt at ease; the daily performance of the ethical living discourse was premised on feelings of friendliness and warmth. As Dan noted above, 'it's good to be feeling that way'. It felt good to belong to EWH, to one's colleagues, and to be recognized for this (Butler, 2004). In turn, this recognition fuelled the continued enactment of the ethical living discourse itself, through loud and open discussions at lunch and at meetings (Butler, 1997). While the embeddedness of subjects in each other was evident from these warm and mutually affirming exchanges, it was also visible from a darker place: the policing that was an integral part of this 'playing out'.

It appeared that a necessary 'outside' to the discourse was continually being maintained. This outside often took the form of ethically wanting, for-profit organizations, as was mentioned previously in relation to Dan and Lizzy's construction of EWH as open and democratic. At times, however, the 'outside' was not quite so far away. Aspects that were close to home were also drawn upon in order to police the discourse of ethical living, and to ensure its maintenance.

Daily lunches are again useful for highlighting the enactment of ethical living at EWH; in particular, the subtle form of policing that supported the discourse. During one such meal, a team member found herself outside of this norm. Chats about the health implications of different foodstuffs had turned to the blue wrapper of a sweetener carton that had been brought into the office by one of the team. Being on a diet, Margaret had bought a packet of low-calorie sweetener for use in tea and coffee on her way to work. Upon examination, her colleagues discovered that this artificial sugar substitute contained the chemical aspartame. This information was met with fierce disapproval from members of the staff who spent a large part of the lunch period relaying the terrible health risks associated with aspartame. The packet of sweetener remained on the kitchen counter for weeks afterwards, and was the subject of many disparaging comments. After this experience, Margaret became wary about contributing food to the table, '(One day) I brought back chicory coffee from New Orleans . . . but of course after the aspartame in the sugar I am never sure if I am hitting the mark' (Field notes, 21 September 2004). The 'mark' she referred to was an attempt to fit in with her colleagues: with the particular way of viewing lifestyle and food that was the norm within EWH, conceptualized here as a discourse of ethical living. Margaret found herself outside the 'terms that make up' an EWH staff member; she was rendered abject by her choices (Butler, 2004).

A further example of policing also involves lunches at EWH. During my time there, I was never told that these lunches were obligatory. However, non-attendance was frowned upon; if someone was in the office but not at the lunch table, they were loudly reminded that lunch was beginning, and encouraged to go to the kitchen. Three months before the end of the UKD project, and the period of research, a new recruit, Emily, joined the organization. Emily was tasked with carrying out a significant amount of fundraising work for the organization and she was extremely busy. She opted to not join the team for the daily lunches, as she preferred to work through and eat the sandwiches she had brought

from home. Moreover, Emily chose not to join in frequent pub visits and other social occasions. This was a source of worry for the management team, and taken as an indication that Emily did not fit in, 'she is not integrating well into the team at the moment' (Mark, interview, 22 April 2005). Emily left the organization after five months, and this was a source of concern for CEO Derek, 'probably the saddest time was just realizing that we hadn't got it right with Emily . . . that wasn't very nice. I mean it was, as in, it went as amicably as these things can go but . . . it didn't feel good' (Derek, interview, 11 May 2005). Not joining in for the daily lunches was seen by all as a sign that Emily was not really part of the organization.

A further example of this policing involved my own exclusion, as an academic, from an ethical living ethos. While EWH was perceived as 'doing good', other pursuits, including academic endeavors, were frequently discussed as not being particularly ethical. Academic work, and the people who engage in it, were often denounced in comparison to, say, development sector activities and workers. The following excerpt is from my notes from a meeting with EWH's leading donor:

John (EWH's Chairman) also made some disparaging reference to academic work in the meeting. (He said that EWH wants) "real outcomes, not just some academic paper" . . . at which (the donor representative) nodded over in my direction and everyone laughed, but really I was smarting quite a bit at this. (Field notes, UKD Meeting, 3 September 2004)

This instance, included in the spirit of writing myself as researcher into this account (Dick and Cassell, 2002; Symon, 2005), shows how work that was seen as less than worthy could be disparaged, in order to uphold the ethical living discourse that was central at EWH. In another example, Roger openly criticized his mother for her lack of concern about food miles: the resources consumed to transport a particular product from one part of the world to another. He espoused disapproval of the way his mother had bought bottled water that originated from Fiji, in her local shop in Brighton.

The above examples highlight how maintaining an ethical living discourse could involve a negation of what fell outside of its scope: how this 'open and democratic' organization was not above persecuting what it perceived to be in opposition. These instances illustrate the darker side of the process of identification. The production of a domain of intelligibility, the ethical life at EWH, simultaneously involved the production of a domain of the unthinkable: those abject beings that fell outside of the discourse (Borgerson, 2005; Butler, 1993). While this idea is common within organization theory (Barley and Kunda, 1992; Kondo, 1990), what is surprising about the case of EWH is that the 'repudiated other' was found within the organization itself. The processes of exclusion that accompanied the enactment of a 'liveable', valid life as an ethical EWH member could involve a co-worker, a mother, a new recruit, or a researcher. Through such exclusion, this discourse was upheld and policed. This process involved exerting subtle penalties for transgressions (Butler, 1993, 2004).

It is interesting to note how these penalties were experienced by those involved in the repudiation. Margaret had been taken aback at the horror with which her using of artificial sweetener was received, something she felt would be considered normal in her circle of friends and family. She recounted the disgust of her colleagues, 'I got killed for talking



about (and) bringing in (the sweetener) because of the aspartame' (Field notes, July 2004). She went on to describe how she had felt excluded by this norm, as though a judgement had been passed on her lifestyle and background. In line with Marshak et al.'s (2000) call for more reflexivity on the part of the researcher, I own that I experienced the disparaging comments about academic work as a felt exclusion. The examples earlier show how people experienced their own reflection in their colleagues, and how this 'diminution' felt to them (Butler, 2004: 235). Being relegated, albeit temporarily, to this 'zone of uninhabitability', was a painful experience (Butler, 1993: 3). These instances of pain show the passionate nature of discursive enactment at work; just as feelings of recognition were inherent to maintaining the discourse of ethical living within EWH, so also were feelings of abjection.

At EWH, identifications with the ethical living discourse were ambivalent, involving a range of passions both pleasant and otherwise (Kondo, 1990). While the sociality of life provides us with opportunities to 'fit in' to achieve recognition as viable human beings, and to feel validated by particular social norms these 'passionate attachments' we have to others can be experienced as violence and hurt. Our attachments make us vulnerable to pain, as I experienced when I felt excluded from the discourse of ethical living. This hurt is the necessary 'dark side' of intersubjective attachments and identifications (Butler, 1993, 2004).

## Concluding remarks

The 'Butlerian' concept of passionate attachment, while discussed by a small number of organization theorists (Borgerson, 2005), has not yet been drawn out for understanding processes of workplace identification. This study illustrates the analytic usefulness of passions and feelings in studies of processes of identification; the story of how a dominant norm was enacted at EWH is a story of *felt* experiences. As Butler notes, passion provides us with 'the possibility of apprehending the fundamental sociality of embodied life': its ek-static nature (Butler, 2004: 22). In doing so, we can come to understand this sociality: 'the ways in which we are from the start . . . already given over, beyond ourselves, implicated in lives that are not our own' (Butler, 2004: 22). Returning to existing studies of identification, what Butler's work shows us is that even within a post-structural framework which views the idea of an inner, coherent self as somewhat problematic, and prefers to think about ek-static 'becoming' subjectivities, we should not disregard the importance of passion. Passionate attachments help us to understand how the ek-static subject is implicated in the reproduction of powerful, normative ways of knowing.

While Butler developed her ideas around identification and power to address questions of gender and sexuality, here, it has been drawn upon to illuminate *workplace* identification. It is interesting to see 'what happens to the theory when it tries to come to grips with' this new and different setting (Butler, 1993: xvi). First, the passions and emotions that we see are much less dramatic than those described by Butler, when she writes about the 'grief and rage' experienced by those who find themselves violently excluded from gender norms, or subject to harassment and discrimination due to their sexuality. At EWH, the exclusions are milder, and the pain more subtle. Even so, they are passions nonetheless, and do not take from the usefulness of this theory for understanding



workplace identification. This study helps us see what happens when Butler's theory is transposed to the study of organizations: when Butler 'goes to work'. A second point involves issues of workplace resistance, as seen through this lens. For example, by not joining daily lunches, can Emily be seen to actively resist the 'ethical living' discourse, and if so, how can we understand this choice? When she describes the relation between psychic life and power, Butler is deliberately unclear on questions of agency and intentionality. The psyche represents something of a congealed history of desire, and these layers of past experiences both restrict and enable the particular direction that a given drive or desire will take. Moreover, the unknowingness she describes, which results from the subject remaining 'always at a temporal distance from itself', means that we can never fully predict the outcomes of such processes. Subjection is therefore not completely free, but neither is it predictable. Critics bemoan this aspect of her work, saying, for example, that because Butler 'does not provide a theory of agency at all but, rather, a general account of the conditions of possibility of agency', her version of identification leaves little scope for theorizing how feminists can take direct, intentional action and resist particular forms of power (McNay, 2003: 142). In terms of workplace resistance, for these reasons, Butler can deepen our understanding of how identification takes place, but her account of resistance is perhaps too subtle to answer either-or questions of 'resistance' versus 'power'.

In this article, I have shown how situated studies remaining alert to such passions may help us understand the ways in which workplace identification connects people and power (Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994). Perhaps it is useful to extend this idea to organizational research itself. As Roberts (2005) reminds us, the self-other binary inherent to contemporary ways of knowing underscores the kinds of ontological violence associated with the research process (Pratt, 2000; Wray-Bliss, 2003). Perhaps, rather than basing our worldview on the presumption of difference between researcher and other, we might be persuaded to acknowledge our embeddedness in the people and settings we research, for better or for worse.

### **Acknowledgement**

The author would like to thank Cliff Oswick, Sierk Ybema, Ida Sabelis, Nick Ellis, Tom Keenoy and Armin Beverungen, and three anonymous *Human Relations* reviewers, for their help in developing this article and preparing it for publication. She would also like to thank Nancy Harding, Hugh Willmott, Janet Borgerson and Marianna Fotaki for their time and care in commenting on earlier drafts. Research for this article was assisted by the Economic and Social Research Council award number PTA-026-27-1315.

### **Note**

1 Individuals' and organizations' names have been changed to protect anonymity.

### **References**

- Alexander J, Smith P (1993) The discourse of American civil society: A new proposal for cultural studies. *Theory and Society* 22: 151–207.
- Alvesson M, Kärreman D (2000) Varieties of discourse: on the study of organisations through discourse analysis. *Human Relations* 53: 1125–1149.

- Alvesson M, Willmott H (2002) Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies* 39: 619–644.
- Barley S, Kunda G (1992) Design and devotion: surges of rational and normative ideologies of control in managerial discourse. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 37: 363–399.
- Borgerson J (2005) Judith Butler: on organizing subjectivities. *Sociological Review* 53: 63–79.
- Butler J (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Butler J (1993) *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. London: Routledge.
- Butler J (1997) *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. London: Routledge.
- Butler J (2004) *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.
- Davis M (1971) That's interesting! Towards a phenomenology of sociology and a sociology of phenomenology. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 1: 309–344.
- Dick P, Cassell C (2002) Barriers to managing diversity in a UK constabulary: The role of discourse. *Journal of Management Studies* 39: 953–976.
- Eisenhardt KM (1989) Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review* 14: 532–550.
- Ford J, Harding N (2004) We went looking for an Organisation but could find only the Metaphysics of its Presence. *Sociology* 38: 815–830.
- Foucault M (1981) The order of discourse. In: Young R (ed.) *Untying the Text*. London: Kegan Paul.
- Foucault M (1982) The subject and power. In: Dreyfus H and Rabinow P (eds) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Geertz C (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Grant D, Keenoy T, and Osrick C (1998) Organizational discourse: Of diversity, dichotomy and multi-disciplinarity. In: Grant D, Keenoy T, and Osrick C (eds) *Discourse and Organization*, London: SAGE.
- Grey C (1994) Career as a project of the self and labour process discipline. *Sociology* 28: 479–497.
- Hancock P, Tyler M (2001) Managing subjectivity and the dialectic of self-consciousness: Hegel and organization theory. *Organization* 8: 565–586.
- Halford S, Leonard P (2005) Place, space and time: Contextualizing workplace subjectivities. *Organization Studies* 27(5): 657–676.
- Hall S (2000) Who needs identity? In: Du Gay P, Evans J, and Redman P (eds) *Identity: A Reader*. London: SAGE.
- Harding N (2003) *The Social Construction of Management*. London: Routledge.
- Hodgson D (2005) Putting on a professional performance: Performativity, subversion and project management. *Organization* 12: 51–68.
- Honneth A (1995) *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.
- Jones C, Spicer A (2005) Disidentifying the subject: Lacanian comments on subjectivity, resistance and enterprise. *Organization* 12: 223–246.
- Karremans D, Alvesson M (2004) Cages in tandem: Management control, social identity, and identification in a knowledge-intensive firm. *Organization* 11: 149–175.
- Knights D, Vurdubakis T (1994) Foucault, power, resistance and all that. In: Jermier J, Knights D, and Nord W (eds) *Resistance and Power in Organizations*. Routledge: London.
- Knights D, Willmott H (1989) Power and subjectivity at work: from degradation to subjugation in social relations. *Sociology* 23: 535–558.

- Kondo D (1990) *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kunda G (1992) *Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Lutz C (1988) *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and their Challenge to Western Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Maitlis S, Ozelik H (2004) Toxic decision processes: A study of emotion in organizational decision making. *Organization Science* 15: 375–393.
- Marshak R, Keenoy T, Oswick C, and Grant D (2000) From outer worlds to inner worlds. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 36: 245–258.
- McNay L (2003) Agency, anticipation and indeterminacy in feminist theory. *Feminist Theory* 4(2): 139–148.
- Pratt M (2000) The good, the bad, and the ambivalent: managing identification among amway distributors. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 45: 456–493.
- Roberts J (2005) The power of the ‘imaginary’ in disciplinary processes. *Organization* 12: 619–642.
- Said E (1978) *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Schultze U (2000) A confessional account of an ethnography about knowledge work. *MIS Quarterly* 24: 1–39.
- Strauss A, Corbin J (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. London: SAGE.
- Symon G (2005) Exploring resistance from a rhetorical perspective. *Organization Studies*. 26: 1641–1663.
- Taylor C (1994) The politics of recognition. In: Gutman A (ed.) *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Thomas R, Davies A (2005) Theorizing the micro-politics of resistance: new public management and managerial identities in the UK public services. *Organization Studies* 26: 683–706.
- Walsham G (1995) Interpretive case studies in IS research: nature and method. *European Journal of Information Systems* 4: 74–81.
- Wray-Bliss E (2003) Research subjects/research subjections: the politics and ethics of critical research. *Organization* 10: 307–325.

Kate M Kenny is a Lecturer in Political Science and Sociology at the National University of Ireland, Galway. She is a Fellow and visiting Lecturer at Cambridge University’s Judge Business School. Her research interests include identification and power at work and the use of poststructuralist feminist theories to explore these phenomena. Recent articles include: ‘Some good clean fun: Humor in an online advertising agency’, in *Gender, Work and Organization* (2009); ‘Aesthetics and emotion in an organisational ethnography’, in *International Journal of Work Organisation and Emotion* (2008); ‘The performative surprise: Parody, documentary and critique’, in *Culture and Organization* (2009); ‘Heeding the stains: Lacan and organizational change’, in *Journal of Organizational Change Management* (2009); and ‘Arrive bearing gifts’: Postcolonial insights for development management, in Dar S and Cooke B (eds) *The New Development Management: Critiquing the Dual Odernization* (2008). [Email: kate.kenny@nuigalway.ie]