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"Us foreigners": intersectionality in a scientific organization

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore intersectionality as accomplished in interaction, and particularly national difference as a component of intersectionality.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors use ethnographic, shadowing methods to examine intersectionality in-depth and developed vignettes to illuminate the experience of intersectionality.

Findings – National difference mitigated the common assumption in scientific work that tenure and education are the most important markers of acceptance and collegiality. Moreover, national difference was a more prominent driving occupational discourse in scientific work than gender.

Research limitations/implications – The data were limited in scope, though the authors see this as a necessity for generating in-depth intersectional data. Implications question the prominence of gender and (domestic) race/gender as "the" driving discourses of difference in much scholarship and offer a new view into how organizing around identity happens. Specifically, the authors develop "intersectional pairs" to understand the paradoxes of intersectionality, and as comprising a larger, woven experience of "intersectional netting."

Social implications – This research draws critical attention to how assumptions regarding national difference shape workplace experiences, in an era of intensified global migration and immigration debates.

Originality/value – The study foregrounds the negotiation of national difference in US workplaces, and focusses on how organization around said difference happens interactively in communication.

Keywords Intersectionality, Difference, Foreign-born workers, Intersectional netting, Intersectional pairs, Scientific work

Paper type Research paper

Immigration is a hot topic in the USA and Western Europe. The so-called "border crisis" regularly captures media attention and has people on all sides of the issue calling for action. Consequently, public discourse about immigration largely equates it with undocumented workers. Yet, the presence of documented, highly skilled foreign-born workers and their "value" is also a subject passionately undertaken. In the USA, some argue that foreign-born workers are "stealing" jobs from US citizens, whereas others argue that such workers help make up for a shortage of citizens qualified to do highly specialized work. Stakeholders on both sides of the issue have statistics, testimony, and pathos-driven appeals to back their positions (e.g. Peri, 2010; Committee on Prospering in the Global Economy of the 21st Century, 2006). While these debates have provided substantial data (and, at times, inaccurate fodder) regarding the perceived effects of foreign-born workers in the USA, they have regularly failed to capture the inconsistent treatment of and experience for such workers in the workplace. To address this failing and in the tradition of intersectional research (e.g. Essers *et al.*, 2010; Adib and Guerrier, 2003), we examine the interactions and lived experience of

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highly skilled foreign-born scientists in a US scientific organization in order to explore how national identity plays a driving role in daily interactions and communication.

Critical management and organization studies scholars have been studying aspects of difference and work for over 20 years (for extensive reviews, see Gherardi and Murgia, 2014; Ashcraft and Mumby, 2004), making clear that aspects of identity do not function alone and continuing to call for empirical examination of intersectionality at work (e.g. Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006). We respond, in particular, to Holvino's (2010) call to expand the study of intersectionality to include "nation in organizational analyses […] [as its] explanatory value […] can no longer be ignored" (p. 462). Our study demonstrates how perceptions of national origin and their particular relationship to US norms of organizing and workplace communication can become the driving discourses (Ashcraft, 2011) through which occupational acceptance and competence is judged, and thus impact one's organizational experiences in both material and semiotic ways. In order to substantiate these claims, we review literature informing this project, present our analysis, and conclude with implications.

Intersectionality, nationality, and science workers

Interest in intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological lens has both diversified and intensified, as it has been taken up for study across a variety of research disciplines and sites. Early intersectional research tended toward structuralist approaches that sought to expose and problematize "the overlapping structures of subordination" (Cho *et al.*, 2013, p. 797) that, in particular, fostered the invisibility of black women in legal considerations of violence against women (Crenshaw, 1991). As such, scholarship in this vein has demonstrated how individuals positioned as part of multiple marginalized groups may face economic and status disenfranchisement (Collins, 1998) as well as communicative marginalization (Adib and Guerrier, 2003). The field of intersectionality studies has grown somewhat uneasily, however, with scholars debating the structurationist underpinnings and incorporating discursive, post-structuralist analyses of identity (see McKibbin *et al.*, 2015). In this latter approach, attention is paid to "the processes and mechanisms by which subjects mobilize (or choose not to mobilize) particular aspects of their identities in particular circumstances" (Nash, 2008, p. 11). As identity scholars, we align with this latter approach, though we would contend that intersectionality is more than a general theory of multiple, colliding identities (Nash, 2008) and that it necessitates a critical understanding of dynamics of (in)equality as they are played out in everyday assumptions and interactions (Acker, 2012).

We therefore define intersectionality as "the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality" (Nash, 2008, p. 2) as well as other compounding and complicating social identities. Here, intersectionality does not suggest that identity is either "additive" (Collins *et al.*, 1995) or static, where social identities "function […] independently and add […] together to form experience" (Warner, 2008, p. 454), but that broad identity scripts and contextual factors "interact to form qualitatively different meanings and experiences" for individuals (Warner, 2008, p. 454). Our assumption is that identity is tenuously constructed and "accomplished" in interaction, "done" through identity scripts that position us in relation to others as similar and/or different (West and Fenstermaker, 1995). Yet, although we view identity as multi-dimensional, we also recognize that some dimensions of identity are implicated more or less than others throughout workplace interactions. In our estimation, intersectionality is not just complex "identity work" but is how differences and similarities are played out to construct relations of privilege and marginalization (Acker, 2012).

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Studying intersectionality allows us to examine how human experience varies based on the differing ways that identity aspects are united in a given body. Yet, despite that intersectionality looks to interactions, intersections, and multi-dimensionality to reject a "single-axis framework" (Nash, 2008, p. 2), the methodological difficulty of capturing a complex, lived experience has seen many organizational researchers foreground a single aspect of identity, perhaps only superficially incorporating intersecting factors (Ashcraft, 2011). As a result, research in organization studies lacks extensive literature on how intersectionality is experienced and lived at work (Holvino, 2010). Additionally, studies that address the complexity of intersectionality often do so in ways that reify race and gender as the central organizing discourses of workplace interactions. This can be rationalized as being due to the historical embeddedness of race and gender in organizing (Acker, 2012); race and gender as representing major bases of domination in Western society (Nkomo, 1992), and the origin of intersectionality as a framework that challenged the separation of race and gender categories (Crenshaw, 1991; Nash, 2008).

Nonetheless, approaching intersectionality with a poststructural understanding of identity encourages us to move beyond the "classic" combination of race-gender, and implicitly, class (Acker, 2012). In doing this, we agree with scholarship that encourages a focus on the differences that make a difference in a given setting. Adib and Guerrier's (2003) investigation of the interlocking of identity in hotel work does this. These scholars argued that simultaneously attending to the intersections of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and nationality was crucial because these forms of difference were interwoven in the interactions among hotel workers in their study. Similarly, Trethewey (2001) noted that foregrounding the intersections between gender, race, class, and age were important dimensions along which white, middle-aged, professional women were encouraged to comport themselves. And most recently, Arifeen and Gatrell (2013) studied British Pakistani managerial women in order to give voice and value to how gender, ethnicity, nationality, and religion come together in embodied professional experience.

In our study of difference in scientific and technical work, therefore, we foreground the intersections of gender, race, class, and nation for reasons that are related to the two organizing logics[1] of this type of work. First, scientific work is typically understood to be "professional," a category of work that is infused with classed and gendered assumptions. That is, work that is considered professional is linked to certain levels of education and experience, and presumes proficiency and upward mobility in the occupation (Cheney and Ashcraft, 2007). Moreover, professional discourse upholds norms of hegemonic masculinity, where the abstract "professional body" is imagined as male, able-bodied, white, and heterosexual (Trethewey, 2001). And, because scientific work typically requires higher education, a logical mindset, and the freedom to pursue an ambitious career, it has traditionally been upheld as the domain of privileged men.

Second, the language of science is primarily English. Scientific work across the globe has come to regard English as the normative language of research and publishing (Hanauer and Englander, 2011), where a kind of "scientific monoculturalism" has resulted in languages other than English to not be considered "scientific" (Hamel, 2007). Accordingly, a preference for English speaking abilities has woven its way into the identity of US scientists, where language is used to evaluate the quality of employees and coworkers (Wells, 2013). This occupational characteristic is troubling in light of our study, given that scientific work attempts to foster collaboration, open discussion, and creativity (Heinze, *et al.*, 2009). In addition, we know that the "ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization" (National Association of

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Colleges and Employers, 2012, para. 2) is consistently ranked as one of the most important traits US employers look for in potential employees. In scientific work specifically, this is no less true (Wells, 2013).

These two logics – professionalism and a preference for English language – suggest a particular occupation at odds with the "reality" of the population of scientific workers in the USA. The demographics of most scientific and high-tech organizations increasingly include significant numbers of foreign-born workers (Banerjee, 2008) who, through legal visa employment, have filled the demand for scientists and mathematicians in the USA. Many opponents to visa programs prefer a workforce of US citizens and have developed resentment, for instance, toward the entrance of Indian workers into the US labor market, which has been described as "threatening the sanctity of both national security and "good" American jobs" (Chakravartty, 2006, p. 39). Thus, many visa workers face immediate obstacles to being accepted into American workplace culture and experience a "permanent sense of 'not belonging'" (Subramanian, 2000, p. 112).

We add that while not regularly researched (perhaps because of their ubiquitousness in highly skilled occupations), level of education and occupational/organizational tenure are relevant characteristics in highly skilled work. Without acknowledging these characteristics, which are often openly discussed in the workplace, we would fail to account for two potential, and often socially sanctioned, reasons for inequality and exclusion at work. We believe that level of education and occupational/organizational tenure are crucial to consider in intersectional studies of occupation, and that their inclusion will allow for a more holistic and fair account of intersectionality.

Based on the growing demographics of highly skilled, foreign-born workers in the USA, and the need to explore questions that surround nationality, language, and tenure/education, our study asks how, if at all, do intersections of nationality with other forms of difference play a role in workplace interactions for foreign-born scientific workers in US organizations? We anticipate that possible answers to this question will help us to more complexly theorize how intersectionality is accomplished and also to shed light on some of the subtle, though nonetheless real, ways that inequality manifests in US scientific organizations.

Methods

Scholars debate how to study intersectionality because of the difficulties in capturing the multiplicity of subjectivities (Cho *et al.*, 2013; Nash, 2008), and because recognition of the methodological tensions inherent in intersectionality theory has paradoxically also limited methodological approaches (McCall, 2005). Our study responds to this debate by articulating our philosophical approach to intersectionality and, subsequently, providing heuristic insight into our methods. We align with scholarship that seeks to understand intersectionality as the construction and experience of negotiating and accomplishing identity, which is necessarily informed by a variety of discursive identity scripts.

Our approach takes seriously the advice to retain a process-centered, relational focus on intersectionality as situated (e.g. Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006), which we do by adopting shadowing methods. Shadowing encourages an understanding from a singular participant's point of view, representing a method that is "sufficiently flexible to attend to the myriad intersections that constitute identity" (Nash, 2008, p. 5) while also making it possible to generate rich descriptions of organizational life (Gill, 2011). Because shadowing creates opportunities to view the relational nature of identity, it assists in capturing intersectionality as "actualized through social interaction" (Poggio,

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2006, p. 225) and helps us answer the question posed by Chang and Culp: "How does one pay attention to the points of intersection?" (Nash, 2008, p. 5).

The first author, Celeste, shadowed three participants – Jin, Shirin, and Berta (all pseudonyms) – who were each working on H-1B visas[2] at a US-based scientific firm where Celeste had previously worked (see Table I).

Closely affiliated with the organization for a decade, Celeste drew on her familiarity as a kind of retrospective ethnography that provided her with a broad understanding of the socialization and work experiences of foreign-born workers. Celeste's experiences are a strength, particularly when balanced alongside theory. This combination – shadowing of three participants and Celeste's insider experience – provided us access to the invisibility of intersectionality. Shadowing necessitates privileging depth over breadth in data collection because of the level of detail made available. Thus, although we acknowledge that studying intersectionality through shadowing limits our scope, we align our thinking with Wee and Brooks (2012), who also present three, situated case studies. They contend that because their analytical interest is "at the level of personalization" (p. 581), a small but rich data set is not only warranted, but preferred.

Data collection

Celeste shadowed each of the participants during separate times, and in a variety of contexts. Her role fluctuated between participant and observer as she sought to meet the needs of the situation (Gill, 2011). Because she had worked at the organization, she had routinely interacted with employees at all levels and had substantial insider knowledge regarding formal and informal organizational structure. Thus, her history with the company allowed her to move in and out of interactions with ease and facilitated both her silent observation of group meetings, allowing conversation to flow as normally as possible, and her participation in casual conversation. Arguably, Celeste's familiarity was a useful ice-breaker for the awkwardness that might have otherwise been present (Gill, 2011). While shadowing, she paid attention to the activities and communication involving the participants and took notes on how attention was drawn to and/or downplayed differences.

Recognizing that intersectional research is also conducted under intersectional conditions (Cho *et al.*, 2013), and wanting to mitigate against the possibility of reproducing the very problems that intersectionality seeks to redress (Nash, 2008), Celeste strove to maintain awareness of her own identity and the role that her presence played in the work lives of the participants. Not only did she possess significant social capital in the organization (as understood by tenure, position title(s), and relationships with management), but her own identity performance as a white, educated, female US citizen undoubtedly shaped the data she was able to collect, as is the case for all researchers (Chavez, 2008). For instance, although Celeste was able to negotiate access to the "backstage" of the organization in ways that others may not have, it is also possible that the participants felt that they needed to "perform" agreement with her during observations because of her position. Accordingly, she sought to reflexively mine her

Participant	Country of origin	Gender	Age	Education+experience	Tenure at org
Jin	People's Republic of China	Male	Mid 40s	PhD+10 years	5 years
Shirin	Bangladesh	Female	Late 30s	PhD+2 years	2 years
Berta	Sweden	Female	Early 30s	MS+7 years	3 years

Table I. Participant characteristics

own experiences, continually striving to tack back and forth between understanding her own experience with the organization and interpreting the participants' experiences through her own eyes (Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013). Additionally, Celeste also sought to take note of when Jin, Shirin, and Berta seemed uncomfortable, dismissive, accommodating, or defensive in their interactions with her, incorporating these as part of her field notes, and data analysis overall.

Data analysis

In order to delineate differences and similarities between the cases, we developed a partially ordered meta-matrix, pulling descriptive data from the field notes for each case and then ordering the data in a standard format (Miles and Huberman, 2004). Once all of the descriptive data were displayed, we clustered columns in logical groups, generating two data clusters. The first cluster focussed on characteristics of participants that appeared to inform questions of nation and gender (e.g. country of birth, perceptions of language/speaking ability, socially-coded characteristics such as skin tone and facial features). The second cluster focussed on how interactions were negotiated (e.g. co-worker-driven interaction, formal and informal relationships). These clusters suggested perceptions of national origin as a driver of communicative interactions even when other characteristics of difference such as education, occupational tenure, and/or gender would be expected to play a more substantial role.

Scientific work through the lens of intersectional pairs

To develop our understandings and generate implications, we organized the clusters around what we refer to as "interactional pairs" of participant/co-worker communication, and we present a series of vignettes to help illuminate the *in situ* accomplishment of these pairs. By using the term "interactional pairs" we mean to highlight how emergent and immediate moments of interaction involve the negotiation and (re)production of difference as dialectical (i.e. inextricably entwined), seemingly fleeting, and sometimes paradoxical. The three pairs that we discuss are: talking for/being silenced; "Giving" permission/asserting voice; and inviting inclusion/collaborating strategically.

Talking for/being silenced

Jin was a project team leader, but despite his status, was routinely silenced and spoken for by coworkers at lower management ranks. Jin spoke English with an accent that distinguished him from his US colleagues, but was nonetheless a competent and comprehensible English speaker. In one meeting, this occurred when he was asked the status of a project by a supervisor. As he began to answer, a female co-worker of lower management rank interrupted and offered her own perception. A moment later, the supervisor asked Jin a direct question; yet, as he began to answer, a different female co-worker of lower management rank interrupted to answer. The supervisor then looked at Jin and asked a follow-up question and the same co-worker immediately answered. The co-worker then presented a yes/no statement to Jin to validate her own responses. Here, she asked Jin "What you've done you've finished right?" to which Jin replied "yes." Throughout this exchange, the supervisor did not comment on the individuals of less rank and experience speaking for and over Jin.

A similar interaction occurred during lunch in the employee cafeteria, this involving Celeste. While seated at the same table with Jin, a female co-worker asked Celeste what Jin would be asked to talk about as part of his participation in the project, and stated that

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Celeste ought to ask Jin to "talk about politics and religion." This co-worker's command regarding what Jin should talk about represented another attempt to speak for him, despite that when Celeste looked at Jin, he was smiling mildly and saying, "no, no."

Jin's opinion about having others speak for him came out during a later conversation, when he remarked to Celeste, without prompting, that the team meetings were sometimes frustrating. He said that he did not want to be impolite but observed, "I don't get to speak." Jin's balance between staying "polite" and being silenced appeared to cause him significant consternation and created a genuine problem with engagement in the workplace. This frustration was exacerbated in a later episode when, walking down the hall with his supervisor and several other coworkers, Jin attempted, unsuccessfully, to gain his supervisor's attention by repeatedly (albeit quietly) saying his supervisor's name. His coworkers monopolized the supervisor and Jin was unable to enter the discussion. It was unclear if the supervisor was choosing to ignore him or if the coworkers had effectively silenced Jin yet again.

"Giving" permission/asserting voice

Outside of the lab and two floors up, Shirin's workplace interactions were communicatively less uniform. Shirin was assigned to project teams to provide her specific expertise and so was not associated with a single team. Moreover, her interactions were often via teleconference because the teams were across several locations. While English was not Shirin's first language, she had been educated in private English schools and spoke in a way that would be commonly (though inaccurately) understood as "Indian." However, her mastery of the English language was complete and indistinguishable in skill from a native speaker. Unlike Jin's experience with silencing, Shirin navigated an altogether different type of communicative engagement, one we might call "disinterested attention." The following fieldnote excerpt demonstrates how disinterested attention was present in a teleconference. In this instance, Shirin was the chair of the meeting:

> Pauline entered the call and asked what the group could do for Shirin. Pauline stated, "Shirin this is your meeting – you run it." With that, Shirin began discussing her concerns [...]. When she finished [and requested specific data] Pauline asked, "Can you do that Ben?" After a short silence Ben responded, "What? Sorry, Jerry was instant messaging me, he is supposed to be in this meeting and is having trouble getting here." [Instead of asking Shirin directly, Ben asked Pauline], "can [Shirin] repeat [it]?" Shirin restated what she had just said. When she finished Ben responded, "I don't think my data will help you there – if it doesn't match up then I don't have it." At this point, Jerry joined the teleconference and Pauline asked Shirin again to repeat her entire rationale for the meeting.

In this hour-long meeting, Shirin was asked on three separate occasions to repeat her rationale for requesting information, highlighting her coworkers' disinterested attention. In addition, she was "given permission" by Pauline (an outside vendor) to run her own meeting. Pauline regularly interceded in places where this would seem more appropriate for the meeting chair. During another meeting that same day, Shirin had similar difficulty gaining attention. In this second meeting, Shirin attempted to make her first comment about five minutes in. She started with "Ah –" but was talked over. She waited maybe 30 seconds and tried again with "I would – ." Again, a third time, "I, uh –." About two minutes later Shirin used another tactic that proved far more useful. Instead of referencing herself, she called out the name of another group member, announcing loudly, "JOHN." In this, she was able to gain attention.

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Moments such as this indicate that Shirin routinely had to assert herself in order to be engaged, which is why we named the second half of this interactional pair "asserting voice." While she had to work to be heard, she appeared willing to do so in order to accomplish her work. This did not mean, however, that she was happy about it. Shirin recounted to Celeste an unpleasant interaction she witnessed between a co-worker and a vendor. What upset Shirin most about the interaction was that the employee would "not let [the vendors] speak." Shirin's strong reaction to her peer "yelling" at and silencing the vendor made it clear that she valued the ability to express one's feelings and perceptions in an organizational context.

Another instance illuminates the dialectic between "giving permission" and "asserting voice," and also shows how this dialectic might play out differently depending on the situation. In one instance, Shirin had a personal issue for which she felt compelled to leave work. Shirin said she felt she had a positive personal and professional relationship with her supervisor, yet she seemed overwhelmed with having to ask to leave early. Celeste asked, "Would you like to [leave to handle your issue]?" and Shirin responded that did not know if she should. Celeste then prompted, "Would you feel better if you did?" and Shirin responded "Yes," and went to speak with her supervisor. What is relevant about this interaction was that Shirin was not as comfortable communicating assertively in personal matters as she was in professional matters. Moreover, we recognize that it was during this interaction that Celeste's own organizational/identity status likely played a persuasive role in Shirin's decision making. In the moment, not suggesting a conversation with Shirin's supervisor would have felt inauthentic to Celeste, as at any other time this is what she would have done. Yet, Celeste's suggestion reproduced what she had already observed: she effectively "gave permission" to Shirin to approach her supervisor. The influence of Celeste's social identity and occupational expertise/tenure only became clear upon reflection, and underscores the value of reflexive qualitative research in matters of intersectionality.

Inviting inclusion/collaborating strategically

Our final vignette centers on Berta, whose communicative interactions at work appeared noticeably different, compounding the organizational and educational seniority of both Jin and Shirin. One point of difference was that Berta regularly folded personal communication into professional communication, something rarely seen done by Shirin and Jin. Berta engaged with her colleagues by joking about "pretending" to work and discussing lunch plans. Her ease in communicating demonstrated how well integrated she was in the company, even though she had worked there for less time than Shirin and Jin.

In her case, Berta was accepted in her group yet was also "positively" singled out because of national origin and attendant language skill. Because the company frequently collaborated with Swedish colleagues, Berta's command of her native language (Swedish) and her indistinguishable accent when speaking English were often called upon to translate e-mails. It was also the case that her language skills were evoked and valued even when not expressly necessary. For instance, Berta mentioned that most of the things she translated were e-mails that her coworkers did not need but in which they were simply interested (e.g. an international work group discussion in English but with short sections in Swedish). Berta also explained that sometimes the e-mails were about someone getting drunk at the bar the previous weekend, and so she would tell her coworkers only, "it's not work related." From these examples, we can see that Berta was actively engaged by others, and her involvement

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was perceived as valuable. Berta herself talked about these opportunities in positive terms and implied that she saw them as a benefit she provided.

Berta's communicative interactions also differed from those of Jin and Shirin when negotiating this research, which Celeste found both uncomfortable and insightful. Although Berta readily agreed to participate, she identified numerous days as "no good for observation." Celeste sensed that Berta determined these dates as "no good" because of Celeste's lack of scientific background. That is, because Celeste was not a chemist, Berta ruled out days in which she would be primarily conducting experiments under the hood or in the lab. Celeste did not question Berta on this, but noted the possible impact her own background had on Berta's decisions. Celeste accepted the dates eventually proposed, and on the first day of observation, Berta asked to discuss the research project in more depth. Celeste recorded this exchange in her field notes:

> I tell her something very similar to what I said to Shirin a couple of weeks ago [i.e. that I aimed to better understand what role, if any, culture and perceptions of nation play at work]. She says, "trying to see if us foreigners are different, huh?" I can't read Berta at all so I can't tell if she is annoyed […] or if she is kidding with me. I try to recover and say, "No, not that you are different but what, if any, are the differences in interaction." I don't know if this is any better but figure I better leave it at that. Berta says (in a voice I would describe as annoyed), "You never know […]."

Berta's labeling of herself and other participants as "foreigners" was significant. As used, the valence of the term "foreigners" seemed implicitly ironic, marking not only difference but "negative" difference. While Berta's commentary could have been prompted by Celeste's inability to communicate clearly, it also is possible that this was a defensive reaction to being "marked." Berta's integration into the organization had been relatively seamless: she had created productive working relationships and positive personal relationships; she was treated well among her peers, and her language skills were evaluated positively. Identification and association as an "outsider" could feel threatening to someone who had otherwise become a "full" organizational member.

Toward a further understanding of intersectionality

These vignettes point to the co-production of intersectionality among the participants, coworkers, and researcher. The notion of "intersectional pairs" highlights the complexities of navigating difference, as assumptions about and experiences with difference dialectically inform (inter)actions. In our case studies, moreover, national origin and alignment with western modes of organizing and communication were more salient in constructing workplace privilege and inequalities than characteristics such as education, occupational tenure, and/or gender. Thus, at least one implication of our research is that it challenges gender and race as the most salient facets of difference in (USA/western) organizing. In the following discussion, we first unpack national difference as a driving discourse. Second, we forward the notion of intersectional netting as a metaphor for examining how language, practices, and the body come together in a comprehensive and complex way.

National difference(s) as a driving discourse

This study allowed us to surface the discourses of identity that organized work in this organization. Here, we follow Ashcraft's (2011) argument that work and occupations are organized around difference, where we are able to know the nature of work by understanding the assumptions and stereotypes that give it shape. Another way of framing this is to examine which differences seem to "make a difference" in a particular

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interaction or set of interactions (Adib and Guerrier, 2003). Thus, although we might assume that foreign-born workers in a scientific organization who possess advanced education and experience would engender respect and deference from their peers, our study showed that this is not always the case; assumptions about the status of education and tenure conflicted with the experiences of Jin, Shirin, and Berta. Jin, who had the most tenure of the participants, also experienced the most silencing, even when directly asked questions for which he was the most knowledgeable person. Shirin, who had more tenure than Berta but less than Jin, was not actively silenced or spoken for, but had to routinely repeat herself. Finally, Berta was never spoken over or actively silenced in observed encounters. While Berta was the most junior participant in terms of tenure (and age), she was given the most space to speak openly.

Because our data conflicted with the assumption of occupational tenure/expertise as a primary factor that orders interactions, we turned to another commonly examined discourse of difference to understand its relationship to the case study – gender. Although improvements for women in organizations have been made, significant equality gaps related to both sex and gender in workplace experiences remain (Ashcraft and Mumby, 2004). Yet, our findings contradict even these understandings of gender(ed) organization. Although Jin was the only male participant, he was nevertheless also the most actively silenced. Berta, the youngest female among the participants, was given the most room to speak freely. And Shirin, the older female, had to assert herself to be acknowledged but was not ignored once she gained attention. In these cases, then, neither education/tenure nor gender helped us to fully understand the experiences of our participants.

As stated from the outset, we were always interested in perceptions of national origin as a discourse of difference in scientific organizations, but this study required us to look more carefully at the nuanced, embodied aspects associated with particular nations, rather than just the broad characteristic of "foreign-born." What we saw was that the more our participants aligned with US stereotypical ideals as they related to language skill and the physical body (e.g. the blond, blue-eyed beauty), regardless of other aspects of worker identity, the more they experienced ease of communication within the workplace.

Jin, a Chinese-born scientist, experienced the most silencing of the participants. Bangladeshi-born Shirin experienced disinterested attention and conflicted communication. Berta, a Swedish junior researcher, was allowed to speak for herself. In this research, hierarchies of national origin already developed in US society were (re) produced. Organizational members enacted these hierarchies by actively speaking for and silencing the Chinese participant, asking for restatements by the Bangladeshi participant, and collaborating with the Swedish participant. And, participants themselves (re)produced these hierarchies (i.e. Jin silences himself, Shirin actively asserts herself, and Berta collaborates).

Intersectional netting

The depth of our case study necessarily limits the scope of claims we can make, yet we contend that the data surfaces the need to develop a rich understanding of intersectionality as an ongoing interactive workplace negotiation, following from the groundwork laid by Adib and Guerrier (2003). Accordingly, we pose a metaphor of "intersectional netting" to help illuminate this. This metaphor aligns with our stated assumptions of identity as discursively influenced, fluid, and shifting. Shared assumptions of identity are tenuously woven into workplace interactions in this scientific organization, but the experiences of difference are variously experienced and

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intersected. Accordingly, our data challenges metaphors of intersectionality that tend toward a structurationalist understanding of identity. Ken's (2008) baking metaphor, for instance, conveys interconnectedness but also implies a kind of stability of "ingredients" and process that we would argue does not generally exist.

Instead, we forward the metaphor of "netting" as apt for several reasons. First, netting describes a kind of flexible mesh that is created through the crisscrossing of materials for structural and aesthetic purposes. Intersectional netting represents a patterned weave that can be intermittently basic and/or complex; capable of folding in on itself, becoming tangled, and also providing order and familiarity. Although structures and institutions undoubtedly play a role in this, it is a role that fluidly "influences," rather than "sediments," intersectional experiences. More significant is that the netting is comprised of a multitude of complex, overlapping strands of language and its associations, everyday practices and performances, occupational norms, and the viewed body, where bodies (whether it be through skin color, hair texture, or clothing choice) communicate conceptions of identity and assumed value (Adib and Guerrier, 2003; Trethewey, 2001).

Arguably, the strands that comprise the netting are tenuously hierarchical in that certain strands become primary, in both routine and unexpected ways. As certain strands are continually traversed, they become familiar and gain strength as discourses that order difference. However, strands previously hidden from view can be drawn forward to construct unpredictable, sometimes startling, patterns. We noted, for instance, the unexpected finding that Berta's European nationality and associated skill with speaking English privileged her communication over that of the more experienced and tenured Jin and Shirin. The very integrity of the netting, nonetheless, relies on all of the strands being connected, since without them the weave would collapse. It is for this reason that we forward the term "netting" (rather than "nets"), so as to frame intersectionality as a process – ongoing and continually negotiated.

Crucially, this metaphor allows for us to take situation and context into account. Intersectional netting may manifest differently across experiences – capturing, corralling, protecting, or strengthening the social identities that "make a difference" in particular places and times. Thus, the findings of our study are largely germane to this organization, for these participants, navigating this occupation. Moreover, because intersectionality is continually negotiated, the most salient forms of difference at one time can become overshadowed by other differences and/or similarities and fade into the netting. The netting metaphor can thus be adopted to examine intersectionality across spatial and temporal dimensions of organizing.

With the above in mind, we proffer four tenets of intersectional netting: moments of intersectionality are not one-offs, but are continuously patterned and ongoing; intersectionality is not constructed and navigated in isolation, but in conjunction with others; the (re)production of assumptions informing intersectional interactions cannot be easily disregarded; they are alarmingly both unyielding and flexible, making them nearly impossible to break down; and the social, occupational, and/or organizational context of intersectionality is a critical component to understanding the meaning of interactions. Ultimately, we contend that intersectional netting adds to the intersectional repertoire by providing a framework to study those moments where assumptions of occupation and identity weave together; in our case, highly skilled scientific work and concomitant assumptions of tenure and education, as woven together with nationality and assumptions of intelligence and contribution.

One key contribution of the netting metaphor, therefore, is that it develops intersectionality theory and method. Our study is a heuristic for examining

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intersectionality *in situ*, as an everyday, localized process, which scholars have indicated is difficult but necessary (e.g. Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006; Poggio, 2006). Of note is how the researcher, herself or himself an embodied subject, shapes interactions and interpretations of those actions (Angrosino and Pérez, 2000). More importantly, intersectional netting forwards interactions as sites of negotiation. As Nash (2008) noted, intersectionality research is still searching for "a mechanism for systematically articulating, aggregating, or examining" the multiplicity of subjectivity, where individuals represent "complex spaces of multiple meanings" (p. 8). We suggest that surfacing intersectional pairs allows for examination of the composition and integrity of the netting at play without resorting to binary categories of identity. By searching for the communicative incongruities that make up workplace interaction (e.g. despite Jin's expertise, he is silenced), scholars can begin to construct the connections/nodes where the netting comes together (e.g. talking for/being silenced). To be sure, where and how these connections are interwoven emerges from the unique participants, context, and discourses at play.

Conclusion

By way of concluding, we posit what we see as vital directions for research. Because our research design was necessarily limited in scope, scholars studying intersectionality, difference, and social identity in organization studies need, first and foremost, to continue to foster empirical work examining national difference, particularly within the context of intense attention to immigration. This work is already being done (e.g. Essers *et al.*, 2010), and additional exploration must nuance national difference as an ongoing and varied accomplishment. This work can aid discussions of immigration reform in the USA by putting an "experiential face" on what tends to be debated as primarily a policy issue. For the most part, the gridlock that the government is experiencing regarding immigration focusses on the right to live within US borders (Gutierrez and Matos, 2015). Scholarship that illustrates the experience of this life can assist decision makers, managers, students, and others by challenging commonly constructed straw-person images of immigrants, and showing the "human side" of immigration.

In addition, we call on researchers to engage with our concepts of intersectional pairs and netting, pushing back on these ideas, and strengthening their theoretical and practical efficacy. We do not intend to forward the three intersectional pairs in this essay as established and enduring; there are any number of components and contradictions that make up intersectional nettings and which may or may not be unique to settings and participants. And, as part of the netting metaphor suggests that it is capable of folding in on itself, perhaps becoming worn in some areas and fortified in others, we are interested in additional research that bolsters the multi-dimensionality of the model by examining, for instance, how intersectional pairs may occur similarly and/or differently across public and private realms, how they shift meaning when transversed across different global spheres (cf. Calás *et al.*, 2013), or how they may layer onto and play against each other. Research along these lines will undoubtedly shed light on how multiple forms of difference constantly weave together to shape organizational experiences.

Notes

1. Organizational logics refer to the "common understandings about how organizations are put together, the constituent parts, how the whole thing works" that are "created and transmitted through texts, management consultants, articles in management journals, books, lectures" (Acker, 2012, p. 217) and so forth.

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2. H-1B visas, which are the most common type of work visas granted to foreign nationals, are temporary, non-immigrant, and employment-based. An important feature of H-1B visas is that they are allocated to what are considered to be professional and highly skilled workers in "specialty occupations" who have at least one college degree. Specialty occupations are defined as requiring "theoretical and practical application of a body of highly specialized knowledge" and include occupations in engineering, science, technology, architecture, and mathematics (Ayers and Syfert, 2002, p. 311); fields that are male-dominated and culturally constructed as "men's work."

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