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Rethinking Difference in “Computing and I.T.” Work: Queering Occupational (De)Segregation Research and Practice

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RETHINKING DIFFERENCE IN “COMPUTING AND I.T.” WORK: QUEERING OCCUPATIONAL (DE)SEGREGATION RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

by

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A dissertation submitted to the
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Rethinking Difference in “Computing and I.T.” Work: Queering Occupational (De)Segregation Research and Practice

written by James McDonald

has been approved for the Department of Communication

Dr. Karen Lee Ashcraft, Committee Chair

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The final copy of this dissertation has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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A central defining feature of today’s labor market is that it is segregated by social identities. Research seeking to understand both why this is and what the consequences of these labor arrangements are has defined this phenomenon as *occupational segregation*. Because occupational segregation is viewed by many as an important social problem, practitioners are actively working towards curbing segregation patterns. Such is the very mission of the National Center for Women and Information Technology (NCWIT), which seeks to increase the representation of women in “computing and I.T.” work.

This dissertation explores the ways through which NCWIT attempts to desegregate the field of “computing and I.T.”. Through a two year multi-sited ethnography in which I shadowed “Sit With Me,” an occupational rebranding campaign that has been at the center of NCWIT’s desegregation efforts, I explore two questions: (1) how does the “Sit With Me” campaign attempt to increase the representation of women in “computing and I.T.” and what discursive struggles are involved in these efforts?, and (2) what are the consequences of the discourse surrounding the “Sit With Me” campaign for relations of difference and the campaign’s goal of occupational desegregation?
Through my analysis, I expose a paradox of inclusivity that is a central organizing element of the “Sit With Me” campaign. The paradox stems from the campaign’s attempt to challenge exclusionary occupational discourses surrounding gender, but without considering how these discourses are intertwined with and cannot effectively be challenged without attending to other forms of difference. To show how this paradox of inclusivity could be averted, I develop an alternative approach to occupational (de)segregation that is rooted in queer theory. This queer approach entails avoiding recourse to broad categories of identity, seeking to dissociate work from difference in all of its forms, and bringing actual work practices (instead of identity categories) to the forefront of occupational rebranding campaigns.

In sum, the main contributions of this study are to introduce queer theory to occupational (de)segregation research and to show how a queer approach to occupational (de)segregation enables scholars and practitioners to escape the paradox of inclusivity that they currently face.
Dedication

I experienced all of the highs and lows of my life as a PhD student in a coffee shop located on Pearl Street in Boulder, Colorado: Atlas Purveyors. I probably drank thousands of pots of Genmaicha tea there as I read countless articles and books, graded student papers and exams, studied for comprehensive exams, applied for academic jobs, and wrote dozens of papers. . . as well as my entire dissertation. And just as importantly, this is also the coffee shop where I met many wonderful people.

Atlas Purveyors opened in September 2009, right after I moved to Boulder, and closed on July 28th, 2013, the day before I officially moved away. I'll always remember this coffee shop as the place that got me through both the joyous and turbulent times of my PhD years, as well as a place that changed my life in very profound ways. For that reason, I dedicate this dissertation to Atlas Purveyors and to all of the people with whom I studied there and whom I met there.
Acknowledgments

Because I believe that there can be no individual accomplishments – only collective ones – I am truly indebted and infinitely grateful to all of the wonderful people (and organizations!) whose presence in my life has enabled me to arrive at this important milestone.

First and foremost, I wish to express my highest appreciation for the mentorship offered by my dissertation chair, Karen Lee Ashcraft. I am also grateful for the support, guidance, and insights from my dissertation committee, comprised of Tim Kuhn, Bryan Taylor, Michele Jackson, and Jens Rennstam. In addition, this dissertation would never have been written without my master’s committee believing in me and encouraging me to pursue a doctorate – merci infiniment Chantal, Boris et François!

Second, I am deeply indebted to the fabulous people with whom I’ve worked over the years at NCWIT, particularly Catherine Ashcraft, Wendy DuBow, and Jill Ross, for their interest in my work, inviting me to join the “Sit With Me” team, and providing me with the tools and support that I needed to make this dissertation project successful.

The generous financial support that I received from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the University of Colorado Boulder’s Department of Communication, and the University of Utah contributed immensely to the success and completion of my project. As my favorite baristas at Atlas Purveyors and Trident can attest, much of this financial support was used to
buy the hundreds (thousands?) of pots of Genmaicha and Jasmine Pearl tea that I drank while writing this dissertation. But it takes more than tea in coffee shops and cool baristas to write a dissertation: it also takes friends working beside you! I’d thus like to give a special thanks to my coffee shop buddies, especially Pascal, Eddie, Katie, and Nick.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all of my wonderful friends and family who, during my five years as a doctoral student, have given me memories to last a lifetime. Thanks especially to my parents, my grandparents, Sylvie, and Alain for their unconditional support; to Kanako and my “League of Nations” friends for helping me discover Utah and for all of our rich intercultural experiences together; to Kell and the “Glee” gang for making Colorado feel so much like home; to Megan, Jenn, and Susana for our Hapa happy hours and so many great times together (and to Jenn for her amazing copy-editing job!); to Caroline, Diya, Lucie, Meghan, Shing, and Steph for their long-term friendship; and to Pascal, Eddie, and Jomar (and Rex!) for whisking me away to Tracks and X Bar every Saturday night. . . because as every gender scholar knows, girls, “they just wanna have fun!” (Lauper, 1985).
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I grew up in a fairly traditional household in rural Canada. Every morning, my mom would wake me up and make breakfast for me: a piece of toast with peanut butter cut into four distinct quadrants. While my sisters and I were at school, my mom worked at a donut shop where all of her colleagues (except for her boss) were women. Even though she wasn’t home during my lunch break, she always had something waiting for me in the fridge when I came home – and I was pretty spoiled: she continued to have my lunches ready for me until I was in my senior year of high school! My mom did tasks such as cleaning the house, doing the laundry, doing the dishes, and making dinner every night. As for my dad, he would do many important tasks as well: wash the car, grill meat on the barbeque, mow the lawn, shovel snow, and take out the garbage. He also had a very different job than my mom: he was a custodian (at the high school from which I graduated) and all of his colleagues were men except for one token woman.

As a child, seeing my mom and dad do different domestic tasks and vastly different types of work was fairly easy to process: there is men’s work and there is women’s work. Although I’ve never been particularly religious or spiritual, these beliefs about women’s and men’s work were further instilled into me one day at Sunday school. My teacher read the class a fable about a
husband and a wife who lived on a farm. One day, the husband decided that he would do the wife’s work because he thought it would be much easier than his. Similarly, the wife did the husband’s work because she thought that it would be easier than hers. Both encountered difficulties when doing the other’s work and the moral of the story was that men should simply stick to “men’s work” and that women should only do “women’s work”. I wonder what my Sunday school teacher would think if she read this dissertation, which in many ways is an argument against the moral of the story that she taught me.

The bodies of women and men are no doubt different from each other in many ways; to claim otherwise would be untenable. In our society, we consider anyone who has a particular set of genitalia to be a woman and anyone who has a different set of genitalia to be a man. People who are born without a clear set of genitalia most often undergo surgery – sometimes without the parents’ knowledge or consent – so that they can nicely fit into one of those so-called “natural” categories and have a so-called “normal” body (Butler, 2004). But do the differences between the bodies of women and the bodies of men imply that women and men must occupy different functions in public life? That women and men cannot do the same work? And that all women and all men are the same?

I answer an unequivocal “no” to the above questions. Granted, I am certainly not the first person to do so. Even Plato recognized that although there are undeniable differences between women and men, these differences
do not mean that everyone should be restricted to work that is considered to be gender appropriate (Annas, 1976). However, even though many people today don’t openly and blatantly state that women should be prohibited from doing “men’s work” or that men should not be allowed to do “women’s work”, the notions of “men’s work” and “women’s work” are deeply ingrained into society. How else can we explain that only 25% of individuals who work in “computing and I.T.” are women (C. Ashcraft & Blithe, 2009)? Or that only 10% of nurses in the United States are men (LaRocco, 2007)?

Of course, the division of labor in today’s society is much more complex than the notions of “women’s work” and “men’s work”. We tend to imagine particular types of women doing some work and particular types of men doing other work. Indeed, before I had even met my hairstylist at the salon where I’ve been going for years, I had imagined him as gay (which he was). And when I was interviewing for academic jobs last year, I was admittedly surprised that both the Dean and Associate Dean at a university that I visited were people of color, since Deans are commonly imagined as older white men.

Clearly, not all Deans are older white men, as I saw firsthand last year. Not all male hairstylists are gay, not all nurses are women, and not all technologists are men. Nevertheless, seeing a male nurse, a Dean of color, or a female technologist tends to grab the attention of people because those are not the types of people who are commonly imagined as doing that work.
Simply put, they are different from many people’s preconceived notions of what the abstract nurse, Dean, or technologist looks like. A male nurse is different from these preconceived notions because nurses are imagined as woman; a female Dean of color is different because Deans are imagined as white men; and a female technologist is different because she is a woman working in a field that is commonly perceived as a male domain.

The notion of difference is central to this dissertation. By difference, I refer to the socially significant ways in which people differ from each other. Examples of these socially significant differences in contemporary U.S. society are sex, gender, race, sexuality, class, ability status, age, immigration status, nationality, language, and religion (Allen, 2011; Cantú, 2009; Freake, Gentil, & Sheyholislami, 2011; Valenti, 2004). I do not intend that list to be exhaustive; no list can truly be exhaustive because differences can only be determined to be socially significant in localized contexts (Nicholson, 1999). Indeed, differences that matter in contemporary America are very different from the differences that mattered at the time of the American Revolution (J. N. Martin & Nakayama, 2010).

This dissertation is primarily concerned with the ways in which difference shapes not only people’s work experiences, but work itself. More specifically, I seek to understand not only how we come to associate certain types of people with a given line of work, but how a group of practitioners goes about trying to undo those associations. My study is thus firmly
situated in the interdisciplinary research literature on the phenomenon of *occupational segregation*, which refers to the extent to which a given line of work is dominated by people who share one or more social identities, such as gender and/or race (Charles & Grusky, 2004; McCall, 2001). As I now discuss, occupational segregation is an important social problem that merits the attention of both scholars and practitioners.

**Occupational Segregation as a Social Problem**

More than two decades of feminist organizational scholarship has come to a unanimous conclusion: work is *not* gender-neutral, nor is it race-neutral (e.g., Acker, 1990, 2006; Allen, 2004, 2011; K. L. Ashcraft, 2013; K. L. Ashcraft & Allen, 2003; Britton, 2000; Kaufman, 2010; Nkomo, 1992). This line of research has found that occupational segregation is a pervasive, salient feature of today’s labor market around the world. As such, the notion of “work” is fundamentally organized around social identities such as gender and race (K. L. Ashcraft, 2011; Branch, 2011). Williams (1995) asserts that segregation, at least along the lines of sex, “exists in nearly every organization and every occupation” (p. 10). As my opening narrative suggests, occupational segregation often seems so natural that it is difficult to notice, as it is such a prominent, taken-for-granted feature of both organizational and public life.

Occupational segregation has long been deemed an important social problem and much feminist research and activism has been concerned with
attempting to curb segregation patterns (McCall, 2001; Williams, 1993). One of the most cited reasons for labeling occupational segregation as a social problem is that it leads to the unequal distribution of wealth among various social groups. According to Williams (1995), at least 40% of the persisting wage gap between women and men is due to the high concentration of women in lower-paid occupations. Indeed, a wealth of research shows that higher-paid occupations tend to be associated with both men and white people, whereas lower-paid occupations tend to be those associated with women and/or people of color (Charles & Grusky, 2004; Kaufman, 2010; McCall, 2001; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993).

Another reason why occupational segregation has been cited as a social problem is that it creates artificial barriers for individuals who seek to pursue careers in occupations where they will be seen as a minority. This is the basis of Kanter's (1977) longstanding theory of tokenism, according to which minority group members in organizations are tokens who are not seen as individuals, but as representing members of the group to which they are hailed as belonging. As such, women in male-dominated organizations and occupations are treated not as individuals but as women, just as men in female-dominated milieus are treated as men instead of as individuals. Whereas men have been shown to benefit from their token status in that they rise up what Williams (1995) calls the “glass escalator” to administrative and management positions that come with higher pay, authority and power,
women in male-dominated environments have been shown to be
disadvantaged by their token status and as being excluded from a culture
that is seen as an old boys club (Dryburgh, 1999; Margolis & Fisher, 2002; G.
E. Miller, 2002; Misa, 2010a).

From a communication standpoint, one of the ways in which
occupational segregation can be seen to be the most problematic is related to
the exclusionary societal discourses that surround it. Frey (2009) notes that
it is a case of social injustice when individuals are excluded from discourses
that affect them. By extension, exclusionary discourses surrounding who
should be doing what type of work are socially unjust. Individuals who are
different from the types of people that occupational discourses associate with
the work that they do are seen as non-normative – sometimes even as
intruders (Gherardi & Poggio, 2007). As such, they are often asked to justify
their presence in the occupation in ways that other people do not have to.
People thus have varying occupational experiences that are dependent upon
the socially significant differences that they embody, with some being
privileged and others being disadvantaged.

A significant amount of research has shown how particular types of
people have been intentionally excluded from occupational discourses. In
particular, women have been shown to be excluded from the occupational
discourses surrounding pilots (K. L. Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004b), hospital
administrators (Arndt & Bigelow, 2005), professional accountants (Kirkham
& Loft, 1993), and engineers (Dryburgh, 1999). In addition, the field of “computing and information technology” (I.T.) has a high level of occupational sex segregation, with women tending to be excluded from the discourses surrounding this occupation. As I now discuss, occupational segregation in the field of “computing and I.T.” has a particularly unique trajectory, and although occupational discourses used to associate this field with women, the discourses have shifted to unequivocally mark this field as a man’s domain.

**Occupational Segregation in “Computing and I.T.” Work**


“Blazing The Trail For Female Programmers” (Sydell, 2013).


“Wanted: Female Computer-Science Students” (Carlson, 2006).

It isn’t too hard to find articles in mainstream news outlets that discuss the underrepresentation of women in “computing and I.T.”. Whether it be in *The New York Times*, on CNN, or in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, occupational sex segregation in the field of “computing and I.T.” is widely regarded as a public concern. There is even a prominent non-profit organization, funded partially through the National Science Foundation, that is entirely devoted to fixing the problem by increasing the numbers of women in “computing and I.T.”: the National Center for Women and Information Technology (NCWIT).
However, if we take ourselves back to the 1940s, the situation was vastly different. Information technology, as it was called at the time, was largely constructed as women’s work. This work was considered to be tedious, low-skilled, and clerical; thus, very much in line with other fields that are considered to be “women’s work” (Scott-Dixon, 2004). Women were still active in the field as it began to gain prominence in the 1960 and was even “the most gender-balanced of any of the engineering professions” (Misa, 2010b, p. 256) at the time. This continued until the 1980s, when women constituted 38% of white-collar computing jobs in the United States (Misa, 2010a). At the time, there were proportionally more women in computing than in any other STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) discipline.

The demographic composition of “computing and I.T.” work began to change dramatically at the end of the 1980s. The proportion of women in the field began to drop, so much so that Misa (2010a) argues that “no other professional field has ever experienced such a decline in the proportion of women in its ranks” (p. 5). Today, women make up only 24% of the workforce in computing occupations. Women of color are even more seriously underrepresented, as 18% of the workforce is composed of white women, with only 4% being Asian women, 2% being African-American women, and 1.5% being Hispanic women (C. Ashcraft & Blithe, 2009). The state of female representation in “computing and I.T.” differs greatly from other disciplines.
Whereas law and medicine used to be exclusively male domains, women are now equally represented in those professions. Furthermore, in almost every STEM discipline except for “computing and I.T.”, the numbers of women have been slowly but steadily climbing over the past 40 years (Clarke Hayes, 2010a).

As seen in the above discussion, occupational discourses surrounding “computing and I.T.” work went through important transformations in the second part of the twentieth century. Whereas the field was originally seen as particularly appropriate work for women, societal discourses eventually came to characterize the field as men’s work. More specifically, discourses largely presented computer scientists as ‘nerds’, ‘geeks’ and ‘hackers’ who are intelligent, but antisocial, white men who pay little attention to personal hygiene (Clarke Hayes, 2010b). Consequently, the meaning attached to this line of work changed dramatically from the 1960s to the 1980s and beyond, from being sex-typed as female to being sex-typed as male (Ensmenger, 2010a). As such, the sex-typing of “computing and I.T.” work follows a similar pattern to what has been documented in work related to bookkeeping, hospital administration, and delivering babies. Extant research shows that each of these occupations was originally culturally associated with women, but later became commonly seen as “men’s work” (Arndt & Bigelow, 2005; Kirkham & Loft, 1993; Witz, 1992).
Many explanations exist for the transformation of discourses surrounding the gender identity of given lines of work. In the context of “computing and I.T.”, different scholars have explained the shift of these discourses by examining representations of “computing and I.T.” workers in popular culture, attempts by computer scientists to professionalize, anticipatory socialization processes, hostile organizational and occupational cultures, and a lack of women’s personal interest in the field (Clarke Hayes, 2010a; Ensmenger, 2010b; Kelan, 2008; Margolis & Fisher, 2002; Misa, 2010a, 2010b; Scott-Dixon, 2004; Trauth, 2002; Wright, 1996, 1997). All of the above explanations are compatible with a communication perspective on occupational segregation. For instance, representations of computer scientists as men in popular culture function to exclude women from normative discourses surrounding “computing and I.T.” workers; professionalization can be seen as a rhetorical process that at least partially involves associating “computing and I.T.” workers with men (K. L. Ashcraft, Muhr, Rennstam, & Sullivan, 2012); everyday workplace interactions can constitute organizational and occupational cultures that are particularly hostile to women; and if many women lack interest in “computing and I.T.”, this can be attributed to women not being as encouraged to pursue a career in the field because of normative discourses that present this field as a man’s domain. Throughout this dissertation, I explore all of the above explanations to women’s underrepresentation in “computing and I.T.” and draw from them
in order to rethink the ways in which we can work towards curbing occupational segregation this field.

What is clear from the literature that explores the reasons for women’s underrepresentation in “computing and I.T.” is that women are currently excluded from discourses about “computing and I.T.”, but that they have not always been excluded from these discourses. Indeed, work such as programming was once seen as particularly well suited to women, as is evident in a 1967 *Cosmopolitan* article in which women were presented as being naturally adept to programming on the basis that this work is just like making dinner (Ensmenger, 2010b). We can thus ask how this task became seen as being natural to male “nerds” and “hackers” and as out of the ordinary for women. Similarly, because occupational segregation is considered by many to be an important social problem, we can question how it may be possible to effectively challenge the current cultural assumption that men are better suited to programming than women. These questions are particularly important considering that a number of individuals and organizations are actively attempting to curb occupational segregation in many fields, including in “computing and I.T.”. Below, I discuss some of the ways in which these individuals and organizations go about seeking to desegregate currently segregated occupations.
Current Approaches to Occupational Desegregation

I define occupational desegregation as the discursive process through which an occupation where there is a particularly high concentration of people who share a social identity is rendered more inclusive to people who differ from the normative conceptions of who exercises this occupation. There are two general ways in which individuals and organizations working towards occupational desegregation have been going about this project: (1) attempting to help marginalized individuals and groups adapt to existing occupational norms and cultures, and/or (2) attempting to change the nature of work itself so that occupational norms and cultures adapt to and become more inclusive of marginalized individuals and groups. Put differently, the first form of occupational desegregation mentioned above sees marginalized individuals and groups in a given field (e.g., women in “computing and I.T.”) as the dependent variables that must change, with occupational norms and cultures being independent variables that remain constant. Conversely, the second form of occupational desegregation conceives of occupational norms and cultures as the dependent variables that are changed in order to adapt to marginalized individuals and groups, who are seen as the independent variables.

In line with the first form of occupational desegregation mentioned above, there is ample literature suggesting that in order to succeed in male-dominated fields, women simply have to act more like typical men. This line
of research seeks to identify entry barriers for women entering male-
dominated fields (e.g., management, computer science) and identify strategies for how to overcome these barriers (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). However, this literature is not always based on sound social scientific research. Much of this research comes from self-help books and magazine articles, often from privileged women who have been successful in male-dominated environments (e.g., S. Sandberg, 2013). Whereas many women have cited the strategies found in these self-help books as empowering, these strategies have also been criticized for attempting to make women adapt to a masculine-biased environment instead of trying to change the nature of work itself by making it more inclusive (Holmer Nadesan & Tretheway, 2000).

There is also a large amount of literature that examines occupational desegregation in the second form that I identified: attempting to change the nature of work itself so that it becomes more inclusive of marginalized people in a given field. Going about occupational desegregation in this way has been especially lauded in feminist circles and has very much to do with changing the normative discourses surrounding an occupation that is currently segregated in some way. These efforts can thus be seen through a social justice perspective, as it implicates both illustrating how individuals are excluded from important discourses that affect them and challenging those exclusionary discourses by attempting to make them more inclusive (Frey, 2009).
The National Center for Women and Information Technology (NCWIT) is a non-profit organization entirely devoted to occupational desegregation; that is, increasing the representation of women in the male-dominated field of “computing and I.T.”. In 2010, NCWIT began work on a national campaign intended to fundamentally change the ways in which we think about the field of “computing and I.T.” in public discourse. This campaign, entitled “Sit With Me,” has thus adopted the strategy of occupational desegregation by attempting to make dominant discourses surrounding an occupation more inclusive. The messages surrounding the “Sit With Me” campaign resonate with other NCWIT work, which aims to transform the ways in which people think about “computing and I.T.”: from an exclusive work environment to an inclusive work environment (C. Ashcraft, 2008a; McGrath Cohoon, 2009), an isolating work environment to a collaborative work environment (L. J. Barker & McGrath Cohoon, 2008b), a career difficult for working parents to an excellent career for working parents (C. Ashcraft, 2008b), and from a boring career to an innovative and creative career (L. J. Barker & McGrath Cohoon, 2008a). These alternative discourses are thus a clear attempt to recast or “rebrand” (K. L. Ashcraft et al., 2012) the field of “computing and I.T.” from a field that is hostile to women to an exceptionally great field for women.

As I outlined earlier, there are important reasons why occupational desegregation is an important endeavor from an equality and social justice
point of view. However, current approaches to occupational desegregation, including the “Sit With Me” campaign, tend to emphasize what has been dubbed in the literature as the “business case” for diversity in currently segregated occupations. The business case for diversity is premised on the assumption that organizations and occupations that have greater diversity have access to a larger pool of ideas, opinions, perspectives, and values, which will ultimately foster the creation of better products and services (Page, 2007; Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, & Nkomo, 2010). In the specific case of “computing and I.T.” work, it is argued that “a gender-balanced workforce is more likely to understand the needs and concerns of a wider segment of the customer base, and will design products accordingly” (L. J. Barker & Aspray, 2006, p. 14). Organizations with a greater level of diversity are thus presumed to have a competitive edge over organizations with relatively homogeneous workers, since according to the business case argument, “organizations failing to employ a diverse range of people are missing out on valuable human resources and losing opportunities to appeal to a broader range of customers” (Noon, 2007, p. 773). Another reason invoked in the business case for greater diversity in “computing and I.T.” work is the current shortage of qualified computer scientists in the workforce. In particular, the business case argues that encouraging more women to study computer science will increase the labor pool of qualified computer scientists in the U.S. economy, thereby providing technology companies with the labor resources
that they need to remain competitive (C. Ashcraft & Blithe, 2009; L. J. Barker & Aspray, 2006).

In addition to focusing on the so-called business case for diversity, current approaches to occupational (de)segregation research consider segregation to be linked to bodies. By the term (de)segregation, I simultaneously refer to attempts to understand how occupations become segregated and how occupations can become desegregated and more inclusive. By bodies, I refer to groups of people who are categorized based on distinguishable bodily features that are perceived as being socially significant in a given context. For instance, women and men have different bodily features that are socially significant at work, especially when considering the extent of occupational sex segregation in the current labor market. Individuals also have different phenotypes, which are distinguishable bodily features such as skin color and hair texture. These phenotypes are used to classify individuals into racial categories and are also socially significant at work, considering that there is a high level of occupational segregation by race in many fields (Branch, 2011; Kaufman, 2010).

Of course, it is crucial to attend to how occupations are segregated by socially significant bodily features because occupations are in fact segregated by these features. It is also important to recognize that there are some economic reasons why desegregating occupations is an important endeavor. However, I contend that current approaches to occupational (de)segregation
research and practice are limited by their exclusive focus on bodily features and their quasi-exclusive focus on business case arguments to promote greater occupational diversity. In the next section of this chapter, I elaborate and make the case for the need to rethink some of the fundamental assumptions of current occupational (de)segregation research and practice.

**The Need for a New Approach to Occupational (De)Segregation**

As mentioned above, I postulate that there are two main problems with both research on occupational (de)segregation and the ways in which individuals and organizations currently go about attempting to make occupations more inclusive: (1) the exclusive focus on bodies and (2) the quasi-exclusive reliance on business case arguments for diversity, which in turn reinforce the exclusive focus on bodies.

One of my central assumptions in this dissertation is that, as Sedgwick (2008) boldly claims, people are different from each other. Although this appears to be a relatively banal claim and an undeniable fact, current approaches to occupational (de)segregation and practice tend to assume that people are different from each other only to the extent that they have different bodily features that can be classified into neat categories and that determine their needs, desires, capacities and experiences. Indeed, extant quantitative occupational (de)segregation research groups individuals with particular bodily features into broad categories such as “male,” “female,” “white,” and “Black.” Thus, we know how many “male” and “female” bodies
are in a given field, but we don’t know anything about the people in these bodies and how they are all different from each other. Moreover, whereas qualitative occupational (de)segregation research accounts for individual bodily features as well as group categories (K. L. Ashcraft, 2013), little attention has been paid to individual communication styles. However, I pose the question: if many women view a field such as “computing and I.T.” as hostile, is it simply because there are too many men who look like “nerds” in the field or does it have to do with the ways in which the men who look like “nerds” communicatively construct hostile work environments? Is it only women who consider this field to be hostile, or do some men also find the field to be hostile towards them? Do some women contribute to making the field hostile for other women? What are the discursive practices through which “hostility” is constituted? And what are alternative discursive practices that would instead constitute an inclusive work environment? These are all central questions that drive my dissertation and the new, queer inspired approach to occupational (de)segregation that I develop.

I also contend that many business case arguments for increased diversity in currently segregated occupations inhibit occupational (de)segregation scholarship and practice from investigating the questions that I listed above. Indeed, it is difficult to argue that a group of people, such as women, will bring added value to an occupation without stating why this group of people is different in some way. And whereas bodies are often
distinguished by socially significant differences, leading us to group bodies into categories such as “women” and “men,” these bodies cannot be assumed to be inhabited by people who will necessarily do work differently from or similarly to each other. For instance, because women are all different from each other, just like all men are different from each other, I believe that it is both erroneous and essentialist to claim that will women create different technological products that no man would be capable of imagining or developing. Consequently, I contend that we need a new approach to occupational (de)segregation research and practice that minimizes generalizations between groups, enables us to better account for how all people are different from each other, and steers away from assuming that people skills or competencies solely on the basis of a social identity that is ascribed to them. In particular, I argue that it would be equally useful to examine occupational (de)segregation through the lens of discursive performance, rather than focusing exclusively on groups of bodies. The strength of a discursive performance lens is that it enables us to capture the discursive practices that lead to occupational (de)segregation patterns without making broad, essentialist claims about heterogeneous groups such as “women” and “men” and without assuming that discursive practices are tied to any particular type of body. In addition, a discursive performance lens to occupational (de)segregation also enables us to examine this phenomenon in a more complex and sophisticated way (e.g., taking into account that even
in a male-dominated occupation such as “computing and I.T.”, some women may feel more at ease than some men).

In sum, this dissertation examines current approaches to occupational (de)segregation and practice, identifies communication problems that are inherent to these current approaches, and provides an alternative, queer inspired approach to occupational (de)segregation and practice that addresses these communication problems. In this sense, I conceptualize the field of communication as a practical discipline in which the purpose of theory is to develop normative discourse that informs everyday communicative practices (Craig, 2006; Craig & Tracy, 1995). Before a full exploration of the research literature in which my study is grounded, I outline the overall structure of this dissertation and the contributions of its six following chapters.

**Overview of Dissertation**

The second and third chapters of this dissertation are concerned with reviewing the research literature that forms the basis for my study and to which my study contributes. Chapter 2 reviews organizational communication research on difference, which is a central concept in this dissertation. In particular, I provide a working definition of difference, outline the assumptions of feminist approaches to organizational communication in which much difference research is grounded, summarize four ways in which organizational scholars have conceptualized the relationship between organization, discourse, and difference, and
subsequently outline what we currently know about difference in the occupation in which I empirically investigate desegregation practices: “computing and I.T.”.

In addition to difference, occupational (de)segregation is a central concept in this dissertation. Chapter 3 is thus devoted to theorizing occupations and occupational (de)segregation from a distinct communication perspective. Drawing from recent research on occupational identity and occupational branding, I conceptualize occupational rebranding for diversity as a communicative approach to occupational desegregation.

I conducted extensive empirical research in which this dissertation is grounded and outline my data collection and analysis procedures in Chapter 4. In addition, I provide an overview of the occupational rebranding campaign in which I participated and observed for two years while conducting a multi-sited ethnography: NCWIT’s “Sit With Me” campaign. I also discuss my role in the campaign and how I position myself as a researcher vis-à-vis the campaign.

Chapters 5 and 6 provide analyses of the empirical data that I collected in an attempt to provide answers to my two research questions:

RQ1: How does NCWIT’s “Sit With Me” campaign rebrand “computing and I.T.” work for gender diversity and what discursive struggles are involved in this rebranding process?

RQ2: What are the consequences of the discourse surrounding the “Sit With Me” campaign for relations of difference and the campaign’s goal of occupational desegregation?
In particular, Chapter 5 provides answers to RQ1 by exploring the discursive processes through which “Sit With Me” was organized and developed. I explain how a symbolic red chair became the central organizing principle of the campaign whose meaning was the subject of many discursive struggles among various campaign participants. I also illustrate three discursive moves through which the chair acquired meaning: (1) collecting vernacular discourse about the significance of the chair in light of the importance of having more women in “computing and I.T.”; (2) developing official campaign texts that edited out vernacular discourse about the chair that was deemed problematic and essentialist; and (3) enabling the chair to be spoken for by the campaign participants in ways that re-associated the chair with the undesirable essentialist discourse that had been edited out of the official campaign texts.

In Chapter 6, I provide answers to RQ2 by focusing my analysis on how the campaign constructs difference. I identify a paradox of inclusivity that is a central organizing feature of “Sit With Me”: the campaign challenges exclusionary occupational discourses, but many exclusionary occupational discourses remain unchallenged. I then argue that because of the paradox of inclusivity that is inherent to current approaches to occupational rebranding, we need a new approach to this practice – an approach that enables us to escape paradoxes of inclusivity.
Lastly, Chapter 7 outlines the principles of my study’s most important contribution: a queer approach to occupational rebranding. I argue that this queer approach enables both scholars and practitioners of occupational (de)segregation to escape the paradox of inclusivity that is inherent in current ways of addressing this phenomenon. I then proceed to reconstruct “Sit With Me” through this queer approach in order to show how a queer-inspired occupational rebranding campaign could be developed. I then conclude the dissertation with final reflections about directions for future research that could further develop not only the queer approach to occupational (de)segregation that I propose, but the ways in which difference is commonly conceptualized in organizational communication research.
CHAPTER II

THEORIZING DIFFERENCE IN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Although difference is a relatively new concept to scholars of organizational communication, it has been rapidly gaining traction over the past ten years. With her groundbreaking book *Difference Matters*, Allen (2004, 2011) contributed largely to making difference a meaningful concept in organizational communication scholarship. More recently, Mumby’s (2011) anthology, entitled *Reframing Difference in Organizational Communication* and containing contributions from some of the most prominent scholars in the field, is an attempt to rethink and problematize difference in organizational communication research. Moreover, the first organizational communication textbook with an entire chapter devoted to “Communicating Difference at Work” was recently published (Mumby, 2013). But what does it mean to communicate difference at work (Mumby, 2013)? And what does it mean to say that difference matters (Allen, 2004, 2011)? I explore these questions in this dissertation chapter.

Difference refers to the ways in which people are different from each other. Seen from a dialectical perspective of both/and instead of either/or, everyone is similar to and different from other people (Allen, 2011). Whereas individuals are clearly either similar to or different from each other in a wide variety of ways (e.g., sex, race, eye color, blood type), not all differences are
meaningful in everyday organizational life. For instance, in contemporary U.S. society, we do not tend to systematically treat people differently simply on the basis of their eye color\(^1\) or blood type (and many people don’t even know their own blood type – I don’t know mine and neither does anyone in my family that I asked). Because these differences do not tend to be acted upon or even noticed, they do not really matter in organizational life and have not been addressed in organizational communication scholarship. However, other differences, such as sex and race, are noticed and acted upon in organizational life. These differences are also important sources of privilege for some and disadvantage for others. Organizational communication scholars thus research how differences such as sex and race matter at work, but not blood type or eye color.

Based on my above claims, I postulate that there are three characteristics to all of the forms of difference that organizational communication scholars attend to or should attend to: (1) the form of difference is commonly noticed and/or silently assumed in everyday organizational life; (2) the form of difference is commonly acted upon in organizational life (e.g., people treat others on the basis of the form of difference that they embody and/or perform); and (3) the form of difference is

\(^1\) Certainly, eye color has been a direct source of privilege or disadvantage in some societies, with Nazi Germany being the most striking example. This shows that culture and context play an important role in determining which differences matter and which ones do not. I am indebted to my friend Edward Young for this insight.
either a source of privilege or disadvantage in organizational life (and in other spheres of society).

Clearly, a person’s biological sex is a difference that matters at work to the extent that it is noticed, assumed, acted upon, and a source of privilege for some (men), but not for others (women and intersexed individuals). Drawing from West and Zimmerman (1987), I define biological sex as “the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males” (p. 127). Biological sex is thus fundamentally different from gender, which is largely conceptualized in difference scholarship as “the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 127). As such, sex refers to individuals as women or men according to socially agreed upon characteristics, whereas gender refers to how individuals negotiate their identity in light of the cultural meanings that are ascribed to their categorization as either women or men. Much research on difference erroneously blurs sex and gender by using the terms synonymously. Indeed, there is said to be an important line of occupational (de)segregation scholarship on gender (not sex), even though most of this scholarship uses only women and men as categories of analysis (e.g., Branch, 2011; Evans, 1997, 2004; Haigh, 2010; Kaufman, 2010; McCall, 2001; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993; Yoshimura & Hayden, 2007).
Regardless of the blurring of the terms sex and gender in organizational scholarship, it is clear that both sex and gender are forms of difference that matter greatly in our everyday lives. There is no denying that throughout modern history and in almost all societies, women have continually occupied positions that have been inferior to those than men occupy – whether it be related to women in Western democracies not being granted suffrage until the 20th century or to women being denied jobs or being paid less on the basis of their subject positions as women. As I will discuss later in this chapter, difference along the lines of sex and gender continue to privilege men and disadvantage women in contemporary organizational life (Acker, 1990, 2006; Alvesson & Billing, 1997; K. L. Ashcraft, 1998, 2005a; K. L. Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004b; Buzzanell, 1994, 1995; Calás & Smircich, 1992, 1996; R. W. Connell, 2002; DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007; Dougherty, 1999; Marshall, 1993; P. Y. Martin, 2001; Mumby & Stohl, 1998).

An individual’s ascribed racial identity is also an important source of privilege or disadvantage that is noticed and acted upon at work. Throughout modern history, perhaps no other social construct has led to more violence and segregation than race (Allen, 2007). Only a little over 20 years ago, South Africa was governed under the Apartheid regime, with all people classified into four racial categories: native, white, colored, and Asian. Those who were classified as white were treated as full-fledged citizens; others were
not. In addition, there is no denying that slavery and racial segregation are a huge part of U.S. history. Today, racism lives on in both overt and covert ways, with neighborhoods in many U.S. cities continuing to be unofficially segregated by race. Organizational communication scholars have also begun (albeit slowly) to consider how race matters at work, an idea that I will develop more fully later on in this chapter (Allen, 1996, 2007; Allen, Orbe, & Olivas, 1999; K. L. Ashcraft & Allen, 2003; Grimes, 2002; Nkomo, 1992).

As seen above, sex, gender, and race are forms of difference that continue to matter in all aspects of society, including and even especially at work. Allen (2011) lists four other forms of difference that she believes shape organizational experiences in important ways: class, sexuality, ability, and age. I would add that an individual’s native language, religion, immigration status, and nationality are also meaningful forms of difference that matter at work (Anzaldúa, 2007; Banerjee, 2006; Freake et al., 2011; Valenti, 2004; Wells, 2013; Wells & Gill, 2012). All of these forms of difference privilege some people in some ways while disadvantaging others in contemporary U.S. society.

All individuals embody and/or perform each of the above differences in some way, with the exception of religion (since it is certainly very plausible to claim that one simply does not have or follow a religion). Indeed, everyone has an avowed or ascribed sex, gender, race, class, sexual preference, ability status, age, native language, immigration status, or nationality. Because
each of those individual forms of difference is a source of either privilege or disadvantage in contemporary organizational life, individuals are all privileged or disadvantaged in multiple ways. Consequently, looking at how difference matters in organizational life requires adopting what has been called an intersectional theoretical lens (Crenshaw, 1989).

The central premise of intersectionality theory is that social identities are experienced simultaneously, never separately (Allen, 2011). For instance, a Black woman is never just a woman because race is a defining aspect of her everyday life (Collins, 2008a, 2008b). Similarly, a white gay-identified man is never just a white man because his sexual preference follows him wherever he goes, leading him to negotiate whether or not it is appropriate to “come out” of the closet in multiple settings, including at work (Adams, 2011; S. L. Miller, Forest, & Jurik, 2003; Ward, 2008). In the two cases above, the Black woman is marginalized on the basis of both sex and race, whereas the white gay man is privileged along the lines of sex and race, yet marginalized on the basis of his sexual preference.

Intersectionality is widely praised and touted by difference scholars, both in organizational communication and in other fields. Indeed, Ashcraft (2011) states that “because gender is one of many organizing principles, it is increasingly unacceptable to theorize it as an entirely discrete phenomenon” (p. 21). However, despite intersectionality being widely accepted by difference scholars at a philosophical level and there being a number of calls
to examine the intersections of gender and race (e.g., Allen, 1995; Allen, 2007; K. L. Ashcraft, 2011; K. L. Ashcraft & Allen, 2003), intersectionality has yet to be seriously taken up in empirical organizational research. Even today, the vast majority of organizational research on difference only considers sex or gender as a category of analysis (Allen, 2008). This has led Ashcraft (2011) to rightfully call for a moratorium on difference studies that only address gender without considering how it intersects with other aspects of identity.

In the remainder of this chapter, I review the organizational literature on difference with a particular focus on how difference matters in “computing and I.T.” work. Because much of this literature is rooted in feminist approaches to organizational communication, I now turn to outlining the general principles of feminist organizational communication scholarship.

**Feminist Approaches to Difference in Organizational Life**

If I were writing this dissertation before 1990, this section wouldn’t exist because there was no tradition of feminist organizational communication scholarship. In fact, this entire dissertation wouldn’t have existed because difference was not seen as a concept worthy of investigation by organizational scholars (K. L. Ashcraft, 2005a). However, feminism has been recently established as a respectable and mainstream approach to organizational communication research. There is perhaps no better illustration of this than noticing that there was no chapter explicitly devoted to feminism in the first two handbooks of organizational communication
(Putnam & Jablin, 2001; Roberts, Putnam, Porter, & Jablin, 1987), although there is one in the forthcoming handbook (Mumby & Putnam, forthcoming).

Feminist scholarship, just like post-positivist, interpretivist, or critical scholarship, implies a commitment to a set of metatheoretical principles (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). As such, it would be an error to say that all scholarship about gender and/or difference is automatically feminist, because whether or not a particular study is feminist has to do with both the researcher’s stance on difference and the values driving the study.

Furthermore, feminist scholarship cannot be viewed as a single, unified line of research considering the multiplicity of feminist perspectives that have been put forth. Thus, while all feminist scholarship can generally be understood as seeking to understand, explain, and critique the complex relationship between gender and power, feminist researchers understand, critique, and explain that relationship in multiple, often contradictory, ways (Mumby, 2013).

Liberal feminist scholarship seeks to create a level playing field between women and men. As such, the systematic ways in which women are disadvantaged in organizational life are not seen as being rooted in the organizational form itself, but in organizational practices and attitudes (Mumby, 2013; Wood, 2013). Radical feminist scholarship, on the other hand, believes that women and men are fundamentally different from each other and that organizations themselves would look radically different if they had
been developed from the perspective of women. Bureaucracy, for instance, has been cited as being a fundamentally masculine, anti-feminist construct (Bologh, 1990; Ferguson, 1984). Organizations are thus seen as needing to be reconstructed to reflect feminine and feminist values. As such, the ultimate goal of radical feminism is not simply to get more women into powerful positions in existing organizations, as is the goal of liberal feminism.

Although liberal and radical feminism are the two main traditions of second-wave feminist theory (Wood, 2013), the majority of feminist organizational communication scholarship is more closely aligned with what Mumby (2013) calls critical feminism. Critical feminism goes beyond looking at the question of gender in organizations to consider organizations themselves as fundamentally gendered. Acker (1990) was one of the first to consider organizations as gendered systems and offers the following explanation as to what it means to say that organizations are gendered:

To say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine (Acker, 1990, p. 146).

As such, Acker (1990) argues that the ideal abstract worker is not genderless, but a man “whose life centers on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and children” (p. 149). Britton (2000) extends this affirmation by pointing out that while the abstract professional worker is most often seen as a man, the abstract worker
in many jobs with little autonomy and low pay are in fact women – and very often women of color (e.g., Adib & Guerrier, 2003; Branch, 2011). It is thus not only organizations that are gendered, but jobs themselves, with feminized jobs being less valued and masculinized jobs being more valued (K. L. Ashcraft, 2011, 2013; Kirkham & Loft, 1993; Witz, 1992). Critical feminist organizational scholarship is thus concerned with the (re)production of the gendered and sexed nature of organizations and jobs through seemingly banal everyday interactions, thus leading to organizational relationships that systematically favor men over women (e.g., Acker, 1990, 2006; K. L. Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004a; Britton, 2000; Buzzanell, 1994; Calás & Smircich, 1992, 1996; M. Fine, 1993; Marshall, 1993; J. Martin, 1990; J. Martin, Knopoff, & Beckman, 1998; Mills & Chiaramonte, 1991; Mumby & Ashcraft, 2006; Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Tracy & Rivera, 2010).

Although feminist organizational scholars have varying goals and metatheoretical commitments, Ashcraft (2005a) summarizes what she believes to be premises of feminist organizational scholarship that traverse the three traditions that I outlined above. Most notably, she argues that feminist organizational communication scholarship considers that gender is a primary way by which social identity is configured; gender and power are inextricably intertwined; gender, power, and organization are continually (re)produced through communication processes; and that these communication processes serve to (re)create systems of domination that
privilege some groups (often men) over others (K. L. Ashcraft, 2005a).

Building upon the above premises, feminist organizational communication researchers have addressed issues such as the crafting of gendered identities by organizational members, the production of alternative and feminist organizational forms, the intersection of gender with other categories of difference at the workplace, representations of gender and work in popular culture, the discursive dimensions of sexual harassment, and, more recently, the processes through which occupations become associated with gendered and sexed bodies (K. L. Ashcraft, 2005a, 2013).

So far, my discussion of feminism has centered on gender without considering other forms of difference. Considering that feminist activism and scholarship has always historically been concerned with gender and that feminism tends to be equated with gender (or, more specifically, with women) in everyday discourse, a discussion of feminism could never be complete without addressing gender or feminism’s ultimate goal of gender justice (Jaggar, 2008a). However, although feminist theory began as a theory of gender oppression, feminist scholars are increasingly holding themselves accountable to considering how other forms of difference intersect with gender and complicate the ways in which gendered power and privilege are (re)produced. In some cases, “gender is no longer seen as the primary determinant of women’s lives and the constitutions and disruptions of other categorizations such as race and class are seen to be as important as gender”
(Skeggs, 2001, p. 429). Furthermore, many feminist theorists claim that addressing women as a single, homogeneous group is problematic because different women experience different forms of oppression. For instance, feminist theorists have claimed that women of color (Carby, 1997; Frye, 1990; Zinn, Cannon, Higginbotham, & Dill, 2008), working-class women (Carby, 1997; Frye, 1990; Zinn et al., 2008), women with disabilities (Wendell, 1996; Zinn et al., 2008), and non-heterosexually identified women (Tallen, 1990) are all disadvantaged and oppressed in ways that are different from white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied American women.

Because of the increasing concern among feminist theorists of being inclusive of multiple forms of identity, Calás and Smircich (2009) postulate that “bringing feminist perspectives to the study of organizations today implies more than a focus on women” (p. 247). They go on to state that adopting a feminist approach to organizational scholarship implies “recognizing that organizations, as core institutions of society, are centrally involved in the production and maintenance of social relations of inequality and subordination, including gender, race, ethnic, class, and sexuality relations” (p. 247). Acker’s (2006) recent concept of inequality regimes, defined as “the interlocked practices and processes that result in continuing inequalities in all work organizations” (p. 441), recognizes this broadened aim of feminist theory by claiming that one cannot examine gender oppression in organizations without also looking at other regimes of oppression – such as
class and racial oppression – and how these regimes of oppression intersect and are interlocking. Similarly, West and Fenstermaker (1995) have claimed that it is no longer sufficient for feminist theorists to account for how gender is accomplished in everyday interactions; feminist theorists must also examine how *difference* is an interactional accomplishment that creates and perpetuates inequalities. In line with this turn to examining difference rather than solely gender, feminist scholarship has also been increasingly investigating how non-dominant groups of men can also be disadvantaged and oppressed in particular ways, thus further destabilizing the notion that feminism is only concerned with women, broadly defined (K. L. Ashcraft, 2005b; R. W. Connell, 2005; Cross & Bagilhole, 2002; Evans, 2004; Simpson, 2005, 2009). Much of contemporary feminist theory and practice therefore aims to be as inclusive as possible.

As stated previously, not all organizational scholarship on difference explicitly adopts a feminist perspective, though it is largely feminist approaches to organizational communication scholarship that can be credited for bringing the theme of difference to the near canonical status that it has in the field today. Difference research in organizational communication has generally adopted one of four stances to examine the relationship among discourse, organization, and difference (mostly conceptualized only as gender). Below, I outline the four ways in which organizational scholars interested in difference have framed that complex relationship.
Four Frames to Examine Difference in Organizational Life

Although difference research in the field of organizational communication only started to appear about twenty years ago, this line of scholarship has expanded exponentially since then. In order to make sense of the wealth of research that has been generated, Ashcraft and Mumby (2004b) organize this literature into four frames: (1) gender organizes discourse, (2) discourse organizes gender, (3) organizing genders discourse, and (4) discourse genders organization. While there is some overlap in the assumptions among these four ways of conceptualizing the relationship between discourse, organization, and gender, each of these approaches is distinct. The frames’ explicit focus on gender rather on difference is reflective of the overwhelming bias towards highlighting gender while obscuring other forms of difference that exist in the organizational communication literature on difference.

The first way of framing the relationship among discourse, gender, and organization is to say that gender organizes discourse. Research in this frame assumes that discourse is intrinsically linked to gender, which is generally considered here as a binary between either men and women or the masculine and the feminine. In this sense, gender is largely considered to be congruent with biological sex and thus a relatively stable identity. Research that has framed discourse, gender, and organization in this way has especially been concerned with identifying so-called women’s styles of
communication and of management (see Alvesson & Billing, 1997 for an extensive review of this literature), but has been heavily critiqued for assuming a direct relationship between gender and communication, thus putting all women and men in the same basket without considering differences among women or among men.

The second way of framing the relationship among discourse, gender, and organization is to claim that discourse organizes gender. Gender is thus viewed as an interactional accomplishment that is constituted in everyday discourse (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Simply put, gender is not seen as something that we are, but as something that we do and that is accomplished through communication. Scholars within this approach thus dissociate sex from gender and contest that there is anything naturally different about the ways in which women and men communicate. These communication differences just appear to be natural since there are different normative conceptions about how women and men should communicate and individuals negotiate their gender identity in light of those differing norms. Drawing from the above assumptions, research within this frame generally focuses on the ways in which gender is done and undone in a variety of organizational and occupational contexts, as well as the consequences of these gender accomplishments for organizational life (Halford & Leonard, 2006; Irvine & Vermilya, 2010; J. McDonald, 2013b; Pilgeram, 2007; Pullen & Knights, 2007; Simpson, 2009; Williams, 1993).
The third frame that Ashcraft and Mumby (2004b) identify refers to research that maintains that the process of organizing genders discourse. This approach is intrinsically linked to the critical feminist assumptions discussed earlier and Acker’s (1990) claim that organizations themselves are fundamentally gendered, privileging men over women. Research within this frame looks at how gendered discourse within organizations is a product of the organizing process itself and of the masculine values that are at the heart of most contemporary organizations. Organizations are thus considered to be gendering agents that demand gendered performances from organizational members – performances that assume that organizational members are men with stay-at-home spouses to look after them. Much of the scholarship within this frame of organizational research on difference thus reimagines organizations to advocate for alternative, gender-neutral organizational forms (Acker, 1990, 2006; K. L. Ashcraft, 2001, 2006b; Britton, 2000; Ferguson, 1984; J. Martin, 2000; Mills & Chiaramonte, 1991).

The fourth frame in which the relationship among discourse, organization, and gender has been cast in extant research has been to consider that discourse itself genders organizations. Put differently, public discourse about work and organization contributes to the constitution of gendered organizations and occupations, by (1) directing individuals to certain jobs that are seen as gender appropriate and (2) promoting organizational forms that reflect what are deemed to be masculine values.
One important form of public discourse that organizational scholars have increasingly attended to is popular culture. This line of scholarship thus largely consists in conducting rhetorically inspired analyses of cultural texts and how these texts reinforce and perpetuate gendered organizational forms and identities (K. L. Ashcraft & Flores, 2003; Czarniawska, 2006; Godfrey, 2009; Gustavsson & Czarniawska, 2004; Holmer Nadesan & Tretheway, 2000; Mills, 1998; B. C. Taylor, 1993; Tyler & Cohen, 2008).

Although Ashcraft and Mumby (2004b) developed the four frames to organize the extant literature on gender, discourse, and organization, the frames can also be used as ways of thinking about the relationship between discourse, organization, and other forms of difference. For instance, a number of studies consider how race organizes discourse (P. S. Parker, 2001), how discourse organizes race (Best, 2003; Wagle & Cantaffa, 2008), how organization races discourse (Allen, 1996; Allen et al., 1999), and how discourse races organizational life and scholarship (Grimes, 2002).

So far, this chapter has laid out a theoretical framework through which we can examine constructions of difference in organizational life, as well as the consequences of these constructions. Because I am particularly concerned with constructions of difference in “computing and I.T.” work in this dissertation, I now turn to reviewing the huge interdisciplinary literature that examines how difference matters in this field.
Difference in “Computing and I.T.” Work

I’ll be honest: when I first became interested in researching constructions of difference in “computing and I.T.” work, I was overwhelmed with how much literature already existed on this topic. What makes this literature particularly challenging to review is that it is highly interdisciplinary, coming from a variety of fields such as computer science, social psychology, education, sociology, anthropology, and communication. Consequently, not all research on difference in “computing and I.T.” is in conversation with each other, as this research draws from different theoretical traditions and metatheoretical commitments.

In order to organize the vast interdisciplinary research on difference in “computing and I.T.”, I turn to Ashcraft and Mumby’s (2004b) four frames of understanding the relationship between discourse, organization, and gender that I reviewed in the previous section, although I look at difference more broadly instead of concentrating uniquely on gender. I thus summarize research that assumes that difference organizes discourse (frame 1), discourse organizes difference (frame 2), organizations produce discourse that privileges certain forms of difference (frame 3), and discourse constitutes organizations that inherently privilege certain forms of difference (frame 4).

Frame 1: Difference Organizes Discourse

To say that difference organizes discourse is to say that certain forms of difference lead individuals to communicating in different ways. As such,
difference is thus viewed as relatively stable and the relationship between difference and discourse is assumed to be relatively deterministic. Research within this frame thus assumes that individuals who embody a particular form of difference (e.g., women) all have a common perspective because of their shared experiences with each other.

Much of the research on difference in “computing and I.T.” that adopts this way of framing the relationship between discourse, organization, and difference makes broad claims about how women, on the basis of their structural subject position, will bring vastly different perspectives and ideas to technical workplaces. These different perspectives and ideas lead women to design technology differently, with women placing their technological designs more in the context of human relationships than men (Margolis & Fisher, 2002; Peiris, Gregor, & Indigo, 2000). Moreover, this research claims that the reason why more women are needed in “computing and I.T.” is precisely because of the different perspectives and ideas that they will bring. A common argument is that “a gender-balanced workforce is more likely to understand the needs and concerns of a wider segment of the customer base, and will design products accordingly” (L. J. Barker & Aspray, 2006, p. 14). Organizations with greater level of gender diversity are thus presumed to have a competitive edge over organizations with a greater homogeneity of bodies, since “organizations failing to employ a diverse range of people are missing out on valuable human resources and losing opportunities to appeal
to a broader range of customers” (Noon, 2007, p. 773). As such, there is a general recognition that more women are needed in the field because technological products will be developed only from one perspective otherwise (Blum & Frieze, 2005).

Some research goes further to claim that more women are not only needed in “computing and I.T.” because they bring different perspectives, but because they are better at some things than men. For instance, Corneliussen (2010) found that women are often described as being better than men at comprehending the situation of the users of technological projects, while men are critiqued for losing themselves in details. Thus, technology companies are said to have an interest in using women as a resource to create better products because of the different ideas, interests, and skills that women contribute to the development and use of computer technology (Rasmussen & Hapnes, 1991).

In sum, research on difference in “computing and I.T.” that assumes that difference organizes discourse is rooted in essentialism. Differences in women’s and men’s behavior are believed to be linked to inherent, fixed, and related to broad social groups. This research thus treats a particular form of difference (such as sex) as a dependent variable, with the independent variable being communication and the technology products that are designed (Trauth, Quesenberry, & Morgan, 2004). Although many other forms of difference exist and matter in “computing and I.T.” work, this research
overwhelmingly emphasizes sex and gender by discussing how gender, but not other forms of difference, organizes discourse. There is thus little research that discusses how a particular racial identity or sexual preference may lead individuals to inherently designing different technology products or communicating differently.

Although much research on difference in “computing and I.T.” falls into this frame and thus adopts an essentialist understanding of relations of difference in this field, other research focuses on how discourse organizes difference in “computing and I.T.”. As we shall see in the next section, this line of research assumes that, rather than difference determining discourse, difference is socially constructed through discourse.

Frame 2: Discourse Organizes Difference

Difference research on “computing and I.T.” that views discourse as organizing difference is closely aligned with the idea that difference is an interactional accomplishment (West & Fenstermaker, 1995; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Thus, as opposed to looking at potential effects of difference on communication and on workplace performance, researchers who adopt this frame look at the ways in which “computing and I.T.” workers do difference in everyday organizational life through forms of talk and styles of interactions that are either seen as conforming to or resisting normative conceptions of how they should communicate on the basis of the forms of difference that they embody (McIlwee & Robinson, 1992).
Research assuming that discourse organizes difference avoids making broad generalizations about groups such as women and men since it is recognized that individuals working in a given field all have different experiences and do difference differently. As Scott-Dixon (2004) notes,

There is not just one story of women’s work in IT; there are as many narratives as there are women, and their multiplicity shows that a vast array of jobs, practices, work identities and experiences are possible. Women in IT are doing every job at every level of seniority and skill... Theories of ‘women and technology’ that propose a single, gendered type of technology use and interaction likewise do not tell us the full story about women’s work in the IT field (p. 22).

It is particularly important to account for the varying experiences of women in “computing and I.T.” considering that not all women who work in this field do difference in the same way. Powell, Bagilhole, and Dainty (2009), for instance, found that many female engineers do difference in a way that maintains the masculine gendered culture of engineering and that upholds the very environment that is seen as being hostile to women. More specifically, they found that many women in this field do difference by “acting like one of the boys” and “accepting gender discrimination” (Powell et al., 2009, p. 425). Similarly, Margolis and Fisher (2002) found that many of the female high school students in their study did difference by self-identifying as “girl geeks,” thereby associating themselves with a masculine identification. Race also plays a role in how “computing and I.T.” students and workers do difference. In one study, it was found that African-American students tend to find it harder to self-identify as “nerds” and “geeks” than white students,
thus leading them to do difference differently than many of their white colleagues (Margolis, Estrella, Goode, Holme, & Nao, 2008).

So far, we’ve looked at research that primarily examines the relationship between difference and discourse: does difference organize discourse or does discourse organize difference? In the next section of this chapter, we shift focus to examine the role that organizations and occupations play in mediating the relationship between difference and discourse.

Frame 3: Organizations and Occupations Produce Discourse That Privileges Certain Forms of Difference

A very significant amount of extant research on difference in “computing and I.T.” examines how organizational forms and practices create an environment that privileges certain forms of difference over others. Because gender is most often the only form of difference that is discussed in these studies, all research within this frame arrives at the following general conclusion: the occupational culture of “computing and I.T.” work disadvantages women while privileging men.

The concept of culture is by no means new to scholars of organizational communication and organization studies. Research on organizational culture progressed at a very rapid pace during the 1980s and 1990s as scholars embraced the interpretive paradigm and began to conceptualize organizing as cultural performance (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001; Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-
Trujillo, 1983; B. C. Taylor, McDonald, & Fortney, forthcoming). Organizational communication scholars have defined culture as “a system of values of any group of people, not just societies or nations” (Keyton, 2005, pp. 17-18). Because both there are systems of values embedded into all organizations and occupations, organizations and occupations can thus be seen as cultures (Alvesson, 2002; Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Trice, 1993). Although organizational and occupational cultures are constituted through everyday workplace interactions, they can have an important impact on the behavior of cultural members because all cultures have implicit or explicit norms, values, and assumptions against which behaviors and communication are interpreted (Keyton, 2005; Kunda, 2006). There is therefore an important normative component to cultures in organizational settings.

There exists ample research that shows how the occupational culture of “computing and I.T.”, as well as the organization culture of many technology organizations, privileges forms of difference over others, making it more natural for some people rather than others to work in the field. One aspect of “computing and I.T.” culture that has been documented in many research studies is the work ethic that encourages people to work exceptionally long hours and late nights (Ahuja, 2002; Ensmenger, 2010b; Kelan, 2008). Ensmenger (2010b) argues that the problem is not that “computing and I.T.” workers are required to work these long hours and late nights, but that they encourage each other to do so through concertive control
processes (J. R. Barker, 1999). He explains that “even after the technical requirements for such nocturnal programming activities disappeared, the culture of staying up all night and ignoring the normal conventions of 24-hour time continued to persist and, in fact, be celebrated, within certain computing communities” (Ensmenger, 2010b, p. 137), which impedes women’s success within this occupation since “this work ethic may conflict with their safety concerns and family responsibilities” (Ahuja, 2002, p. 26). These dominant norms are clearly reflective of what Acker (1990) cites as the ideal, abstract worker: “a male worker whose life centers on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and children” (p. 149). Indeed, Kelan (2008) argues that the occupational culture of “computing and I.T.” is modeled on a stereotypical male lifestyle, thus making it more difficult for many women to integrate into the field (Ahuja, 2002; Rasmussen & Hapnes, 1991).

The occupational culture of “computing and I.T.” has also been seen as reflecting a masculine bias through the vocabulary that is used to discuss computers. For instance, terms such as ‘killing’ and ‘aborting’ jobs, ‘crashing’, ‘executing’ programs, ‘bombing’, and creating ‘killer apps’, as both Wright (1997) and Misa (2010a) have argued, are macho terms that carry distinctively masculine values. In addition to these terms, sexist humor has also been shown to be prevalent in computing culture, where two-thirds of
women report harassment and where the work conditions remain hostile to female employees (Misa, 2010b).

Because research in this frame views the culture of technical organizations and the occupation of “computing and I.T.” as privileging men over women, many scholars have argued that these cultures must be changed in order to better integrate women into “computing and I.T.” (Margolis & Fisher, 2002). For instance, Margolis and Fisher (2002) argue that the occupational culture of computing needs to be reformed to show a greater concern for “people, family, ‘balance in life,’ novels, and a good night’s sleep” (p. 72) in order to eradicate the masculine biases that are currently at the heart of computing culture. However, as I outline in the next section of this review, other scholars have argued that attempts to change the occupational culture of computing are self-defeating unless representations of “computing and I.T.” in cultural texts simultaneously become more inclusive of all forms of difference.

Frame 4: Discourse Constitutes Organizations and Occupations That Inherently Privilege Certain Forms of Difference

A large amount of research on difference in “computing and I.T.” work traces representations of the field in popular culture in order to shed light on how the field became so heavily associated with men. This research thus carries the assumption that representations of organizational life in popular culture have tangible consequences, since “organizations are topics for
popular culture, and popular culture is a resource in organizations” (Rhodes & Parker, 2008, p. 632). Representations of “computing and I.T.” in popular culture are especially seen as important to consider since many individuals develop their initial impressions of a particular line of work through cultural texts (Clarke Hayes, 2010b). Moreover, cultural texts “carry implicit and significant messages about idealized views of males and females in culture” (L. J. Barker & Aspray, 2006, p. 39) and can impact biases that people hold towards which types of people belong in a given occupation (Clarke Hayes, 2010b).

Although public discourse about “computing and I.T.” tended to associate women with this line of work as the field was burgeoning during the 1960s, public discourse about “computing and I.T.” quickly shifted to presenting the field as men’s work (Ensmenger, 2010b). Thus, as the discipline of computer science became increasingly established during the 1970s and beyond, computer scientists became commonly referred to as geeks and associated with a particular type of masculinity: “antisocial white males, highly skilled and intelligent, but who pay little attention to personal hygiene” (Clarke Hayes, 2010b, p. 268). Although these depictions were surely unappealing to many men, Clarke Hayes (2010b) has argued that they were particularly unappealing to women and served to mark “computing and I.T.” as a man’s domain. Moreover, Ensmenger (2010b) adds that as the “the story of the computer nerd” (p. 137) has circulated through cultural texts,
computer scientists have continued to be associated with white, adolescent males, which further reinforces the notion that women do not belong in this field.

In an analysis of *Wired* magazine, Misa (2010b) found that the images of computer scientists clearly presented these workers as male, with women either being absent or objectified in these images. Other scholars have also argued that in advertisements and magazines, men are more often presented as being the active creators of technology, with women only being shown as passive users of technology (L. J. Barker & Aspray, 2006).

As seen in this section, cultural texts certainly portray those who work in “computing and I.T.” as particular types of men, which excludes many people from the dominant discourses surrounding the field and who belongs in it. I now turn to summarizing the research on difference in “computing and I.T.” and outlining how this research could be reframed in order to address what I believe to be the biggest limitation of this literature: its quasi-exclusive focus on gendered bodies.

*Summary*

There are many ways in which the relationship between discourse, organization, and difference can be cast. As seen in my review, scholars investigating relations of difference in “computing and I.T.” work have looked at how particular forms of difference shape discourse, how discourse constitutes difference, how organizations and occupations privilege certain
forms of difference, and how public discourse works to create and sustain 
organizational and occupational cultures in which certain forms of difference 
are privileged.

Although I sought out to review research on difference instead of 
exclusively on gender, this proved to be a nearly impossible task. Whereas 
there is an immense amount of research on gender in “computing and I.T.”, 
there is very little research on how other forms of difference matter in this 
field (for an exception, see Margolis et al., 2008). However, just because other 
forms of difference haven’t yet been addressed in the extant literature does 
not mean that these forms of difference don’t matter. Earlier, I postulated 
that difference matters when it is either commonly noticed or silently 
assumed in everyday organizational life, commonly acted upon in 
organizational life, and a source of either privilege or disadvantage in 
organizational life. Sex and gender are two of these forms of difference, but it 
is clear that other forms of difference such as race, sexuality, class, ability, 
and native language also shape the experience of individuals either working 
in “computing and I.T.” or interested in this field. Scholars of difference in 
“computing and I.T.” thus need a theoretical and analytical framework to 
direct them to accounting for multiple forms of difference. Moreover, this 
framework needs to recognize the fluidness of identity and how forms of 
difference mean different things to different people at different times in 
different contexts.
In order to consider how multiple forms of difference always matter at work and how these forms of difference intersect with each other in fluid and shifting ways, I postulate that scholars need to more explicitly focus on the ways in which organizational discourse and discursive performances destabilize difference. This frame draws from the second frame developed by Ashcraft and Mumby (2004b), most notably that discourse organizes difference, but refocuses the attention from the ways in which difference is constructed to the ways in which difference is deconstructed and destabilized through everyday discursive performances. This approach is rooted in queer theory, which always seeks to deconstruct, rather than reify, forms of difference, as well as considers constructions of difference as fluid and always subject to renegotiation. In the next and final section of this chapter, I develop this queer approach to organizational research on difference and show how it enables us to rethink the relationship between organization, difference, and discourse in productive, useful ways.

**Queering Organizational Communication Research on Difference**

I began this chapter by defining difference and outlining some of the foundational principles of feminist organizational theory. In this section, I expose another set of assumptions that can be used in organizational research on difference. These assumptions are rooted in queer theory, which offers a radically different view of difference than the various strands of feminist theory, although feminist and queer theorists are allies in that they
critique extant power relations related to various forms of difference and are unapologetically political (Hammers & Brown, 2004; Marinucci, 2010; Parker, 2002).

Outlining the fundamental assumptions of queer theory is difficult because ‘queer’ is a turbulent and unsettling term with no clear referent (Jagose, 1996; Parker, 2002). Operationalizing the term “queer” in an absolute or objective way would even go against what queer theory purports to do: deconstruct and break down broad categories and labels. Deconstructing and breaking down these categories implies undermining all stable notions of identity and subjecting all categories of identity to scrutiny for the differences that they mask (Hammers & Brown, 2004; Rodríguez, 2003). Queer theorists thus deconstruct binaries such as women/men and gay/straight, thereby emptying them of any stable, coherent meaning (Jagose, 1996). Consequently, queer theory conceptualizes all forms of identity as fluid, changeable, and open to renegotiation (Sedgwick, 2008). Queer theory and feminist theory thus have radically different stances on difference, since while queer theory refuses to consider any identity as a coherent, objective, empirical fact about a person, feminist theory has largely developed by viewing difference as categorical and stable (e.g., I am a woman, I am feminine, I am heterosexual) (Butler, 2007; Sedgwick, 2008). Queer theorists posit that exclusionary politics based upon seemingly fixed categories such as “women” are harmful in that these politics render invisible
the cultural and political intersections that produce those very categories, thereby reproducing relations of domination (Butler, 2007; Jagose, 1996). Indeed, mainstream second-wave feminist theory in the 1970s was extensively critiqued for its tendency to homogenize the category women, thereby equating “women” with “white women” and leaving the voices and experiences of women of color out of feminist theory (e.g., Carby, 1997).

Furthermore, queer theorists such as Sedgwick (2008) theorize difference through the metaphor of the closet in order to underscore that important, socially significant differences are not always visible, further complicating the task of speaking for a group of people who are believed to share similar political concerns on the basis of a given identity category.

Another one of the reasons that queer theorists deconstruct categories is that categories are seen as being unproductive. An individual’s behavior cannot be attributed to or predicted from any given identity category, since the nuances of embodied relations with others are much more complex than an identification with a particular category (Gannon, 2011). Indeed, because the paths that lead individuals to identifying with and/or enacting a particular identity are varied, queer theorists eschew broad generalizations about identities and forms of difference. As Sedgwick (2008) says, “what brings me to this work can hardly be that I am a woman, or a feminist, but that I am this particular one” (p. 59), thereby recognizing that all individuals that are placed within a given category are different from each other and
have varying experiences, interests, and values. The notion of performance is thus central to queer theory, since identities are said to be constituted in everyday performances rather than in fixed attributes such as chromosomes and genitalia (Butler, 2007).

Difference is incontestably an important concern of queer theorists. However, in addition to theorizing difference, queer theory (just like feminism) also articulates metatheoretical assumptions about the ways in which we can understand the world and make truth claims. As Parker (2002) puts it, citing Warner (1993), the aim of queer theory is to make theory queer, not to develop a theory about queer people or queer life. Consequently, when I claim that this dissertation develops a queer approach to occupational (de)segregation research, this does not simply entail re-writing existing theory in order to take the experiences of queer-identified people and lives into account. Rather, it involves queering the very ideas of difference and occupational (de)segregation, thereby challenging the ways in which these concepts are currently operationalized in mainstream organizational research and practice (Parker, 2002).

When theorizing occupational (de)segregation through a queer lens, attending to the concepts of social justice, performance, body, materiality, and discourse is unavoidable. The notion of social justice is particularly important because of the unapologetic political aims of queer theory. However, queer theory conceptualizes social justice in different terms than in
many established feminist theory circles. When considering the issue of occupational (de)segregation in “computing and I.T.” work, a liberal feminist perspective would claim that social justice will be achieved when more women enter the field and are thus actively engaged in creating new technology. As discussed earlier, such is the explicit aim of NCWIT and its “Sit With Me” campaign. However, a queer metatheoretical stance on social justice enables us to view the issue differently. As opposed to social justice being about simply getting more women to work in “computing and I.T.”, social justice is concerned with de-naturalizing the very notions of gender and difference in occupational life. Because both gender and difference are constructions that, according to Butler (2007), are nothing more than a “stylized repetition of acts” (p. 191), they must be separated from female and male bodies respectively by contesting these constructions through alternative reiterations of acts that subvert dominant norms (Butler, 1993). Therefore, a queer approach to occupational (de)segregation views social justice as being primarily related to enabling the repeated subversion of norms that, over time, make any natural association between work and the people who are performing that work fall apart. The goal is thus to make it so that when individuals think about “computing and I.T.” work in broad, abstract terms, there is no pre-conceived image about which people are the most naturally inclined to pursue such work. Put differently, and in the terms of Butler (2004), gender and difference would be undone in “computing
and I.T.” (and in organizational life in general) through workers’ repeated subversive performances.

One particularly poignant example of a subversive performance that Butler (2007) cites has to do with an abstract neighborhood gay restaurant closing for vacation and putting up a sign explaining that “she’s overworked and needs a rest” (p. 167, emphasis added). Butler (2007) notes that “this very gay appropriation of the feminine works to multiply possible sites of application of the term, to reveal the arbitrary relation between the signifier and the signified, and to destabilize and mobilize the sign” (p. 167), thereby de-naturalizing the gender binary that tends to be taken for granted in everyday discourse. Whereas the subversive performance in the example above is rooted in discourse, subversive performances can also result from embodiment. Halberstam (1998), for instance, shows how the line between what is female and what is male can get blurred in public restrooms by referring to a butch lesbian who was escorted out of the woman’s bathroom in an airport after security had received a complaint that there was a man in the bathroom. Through such subversive performances, individuals can blur the boundaries that surround categories of difference, which in turn shatters the idea that an individual belongs more or less naturally to a given occupation on the basis of a given form of difference. Indeed, through such subversive performances, all forms of difference can become fluid, dynamic, and arbitrary.
As is clear in the above paragraphs, the notions of body, performance, discourse, and materiality are central to queer theory and are closely intertwined. At the most basic level, bodies refer to the material features that make up a given person upon which cultural meanings are constructed. For instance, genitalia is a material feature of bodies, as are eye color, skin color, shoe size, hair texture, and so on. When adopting a social constructionist ontology, people with a given set of bodily features that are deemed to be socially significant (e.g., vaginas) are grouped together into one social category (e.g., “women”). These social categories subsequently form the basis on which “difference” in organizational and occupational life is discussed.

By contrast, a queer ontology emphasizes the malleability of the material features of the body; that is, bodies are not stable objects, but are living things that are always undergoing change. Moreover, the material features of bodies can be stylized in any number of ways in order to produce different effects, which becomes particularly evident in drag performances. However, according to Butler (1993, 2007), everyone is always doing drag through the reiteration of normative gendered practices that produce certain effects (e.g., being labeled a man, woman, boy, girl, and so on). This performative reiteration of norms can take different subversive forms, which can be seen in drag shows. Thus, according to queer theory, the materiality of the body be stylized in any number of ways through ritualized performance
into order to produce a given effect that is named through discourse (Butler, 1993). In this sense, difference is performative: calling an individual a woman based on the stylization of her body is what makes her a woman – nothing else (Butler, 2007). Categories such as “women” and “men” are thus mere discursive constructions that only appear to be natural. Therefore, queer theory postulates we must always treat these categories as local, malleable, discursive constructions that have no basis in material reality. As such, a queer discussion about difference must always go beyond these categories. A queer perspective on occupational (de)segregation would thus not take for granted the categories on which occupations are said to be segregated (e.g., women, men), as is currently the norm.

Research that is rooted in the premises of queer theory that I articulated above has slowly been making its way into mainstream organizational research. Much of this research has consisted in analyzing cultural texts about work and organizations through a queer lens in order to deconstruct meanings that are hidden by broad, binary categories (Bowring, 2004; Tyler & Cohen, 2008). Queer theory has also been used as a lens through which to reimagine longstanding organizational theories and notions. For instance, a recent study queers leadership research by illustrating how existing leadership theories rest upon binaries that inhibit us from discussing organizational leadership in meaningful ways (Harding, Lee, Ford, & Learmonth, 2011). Moreover, the notion of feminine
organizations has been deconstructed through queer theory in order to expose the essentialist assumptions of gender upon which this notion is based (Brewis, Hampton, & Linstead, 1997).

So far, I have summarized the premises of queer theory and explained how these premises are different from those that guide current approaches to understanding difference in organizational and occupational life. I draw heavily on these queer premises over the course of this dissertation, which seeks to illustrate how queer theory offers a useful alternative to the ways in which difference is commonly conceptualized in mainstream organizational scholarship. But what are the original contributions of incorporating queer thought into occupational (de)segregation research and practice? I seek to succinctly and clearly provide answers to this question in the remaining paragraphs of this chapter.

As I argued earlier, current approaches to researching difference in organizational and occupational life rest largely upon stable notions of identity and tend to group individuals into broad categories based on bodily features (e.g., women) without considering how the use of these categories constrains us from talking about difference in more meaningful, complex ways. Occupational segregation in “computing and I.T.”, for instance, is much more complex than being an issue about women and men. Moreover, in extant research there is little attention to the ways in which difference is not only an embodied performance but also a discursive performance that
manifests itself in an individual’s communication style (e.g., adopting a collaborative or adversary tone, asking for things explicitly or implicitly, using a soft or strong voice). By considering how discourse destabilizes difference, organizational researchers are in a more favorable position to account for how all individuals are different from each other on the basis of multiple forms of difference that are both embodied and discursive. Thus, queering existing research on difference in “computing and I.T.” entails deconstructing the categories that the existing research reifies and examining difference in a broader, performative way. Queer theory thus enables scholars to study difference as it is enacted in everyday performances rather than through broad categories that we, as researchers, ascribe to our participants. Conceptualizing difference through this queer lens thus enables us to consider how not all “women” in a field such as “computing and I.T.” experience marginalization and/or privilege in the same ways. Indeed, our attention is directed towards examining how difference is manifested in everyday performances, which performances are valued over others, and how certain performances can de-value and “other” individuals in a given organizational setting to the point where they feel like they do not belong. This queer approach to occupational (de)segregation is thus fundamentally inductive (e.g., scholars do not go into a study with pre-conceived notions about which forms of difference matter), whereas current approaches – including NCWIT’s “Sit With Me” campaign – are very much deductive (e.g.,
the forms of difference that are said to matter in organizational life, such as gender and/or race, are decided prior to a research study or rebranding campaign even beginning).

In sum, the original contributions of bringing queer theory into occupational (de)segregation are as follows:

- A queer approach deconstructs, rather than reifies, commonly taken for granted identity categories in order to expose differences among people who are often perceived as sharing the same experiences (e.g., “women” in “computing and I.T.”)
- A queer approach directs our attention to both embodied and discursive (that is, material and immaterial) forms of difference.
- A queer approach is inductive in that the forms of difference that are said to matter come directly from the data, rather than in pre-existing assumptions.

In Chapter 7, I reflect more specifically on the original contributions of my application and development of this queer approach to occupational (de)segregation in this dissertation.

Of course, viewing difference through the lens of queer theory is just one of many acceptable stances on difference. In this chapter, I have reviewed many other ways of theorizing difference in organizational communication research. This research has been categorized into four frames, each with a particular set of assumptions about the relationship
between difference, organization, and discourse (K. L. Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004b). We have also examined the different metatheoretical assumptions of feminist and queer approaches to difference, which led me to advocate changing our focus from how discourse constructs difference to the ways in which discourse often deconstructs and destabilizes difference.

Because this dissertation seeks to examine the discursive processes through which practitioners attempt to promote difference in the field of “computing and I.T.”, my analysis will explore the following questions: What stances on difference are articulated in these attempts to promote difference in “computing and I.T.”? What are the consequences of articulating certain stances on difference, but not others? And what could be the potential benefits and/or disadvantages of discussing difference in alternative ways? Before examining these questions, however, we have yet to theorize occupations through the communicative lens that is central to my analysis. In the next chapter of this dissertation, I thus theorize the notion of “occupation” by reflecting on what an occupation is, how occupations can be theorized as communicative constructions, and how difference is a defining feature of certain occupations.
Work is such an important part of social life that it shouldn’t be surprising that there is a vast interdisciplinary literature that focuses on work and everything that surrounds it. Indeed, research that explicitly addresses problematics related to difference and occupational life can be found in organization studies journals (e.g., Collinson, 1988; Matanle, McCann, & Ashmore, 2008), management journals (e.g., Evetts, 1997; G. A. Fine, 1996; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006), sociology journals (e.g., Phelan & Kinsella, 2009; Shuey & Jovic, 2013), social psychology journals (e.g., Dasgupta, 2011; Harned, Ormerod, Palmieri, Collingsworth, & Reed, 2002; Rosenbloom, Ash, Dupont, & Coderd, 2008), and even journals in fields such as nursing (Villeneuve, 1994) and information technology (Trauth, Nielsen, & Hellens, 2003).

Within this interdisciplinary literature, post-positivist metatheoretical assumptions largely dominate. Within post-positivism, researchers tend to value causal explanations to social phenomena (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010); as such, post-positivist research can be read as a discourse of explanation (Mumby, 1997a). Extant post-positivist research on work and occupations thus develops analyses of trends in the labor market across historical and cultural contexts through the use of sophisticated quantitative methods. The
vast majority of the existing interdisciplinary research on occupational segregation thus poses questions such as: What is the percentage of women compared to men in fields such as “computing and I.T.” work? How is this field also segregated by social identities such as race? What are the earnings of white women in this field compared to those of men and of women of color? What do these segregation patterns look like in different economies, outside of the United States? Clearly, this type of research, which has been pursued by researchers such as Charles and Grusky (2004), Kaufman (2010), McCall (2001), Reskin and Roos (1990), and Tomaskovic-Devey (1993), is crucial for better understanding the state of occupational segregation patterns and the ways in which they are problematic.

What has yet to be largely developed in the interdisciplinary literature on work and occupations, however, are interpretive and critical analyses of the discursive processes through which the social identities of workers become intrinsically aligned with the work that they are doing, thereby creating and sustaining occupational segregation patterns. Organizational communication scholars are particularly well poised to conduct such analyses and make important contributions to this interdisciplinary literature (K. L. Ashcraft, 2011), but have so far been slow to consider work and occupations as worthy concepts of organizational communication scholarship. For instance, in Management Communication Quarterly, which has been hailed as the home journal of organizational communication scholars (Mumby &
Stohl, 1996), only three articles have appeared with the terms ‘occupation’ or ‘occupational’ in the title since the journal’s foundation in 1987: the works of Ashcraft (2005b), Meisenbach (2008), and Miller, Zook and Ellis (1989). This journal search provides evidence for Ashcraft’s (2011) argument that studies of work and occupations have been generally kept out of the purview of most organizational communication scholars. Citing this dearth of work and occupations research in organizational communication, Ashcraft (2008) calls for the need for “greater intersection between studies of organization, occupation, and profession” (p. 20). Although Barley and Kunda (2001) concur, Ashcraft (2013) goes further to suggest that work and occupations cannot be examined independently of the social identities of workers because the meaning of work is closely aligned with these social identities.

In this chapter, my principal goal is to theorize work and occupations from an organizational communication perspective so as to illustrate how organizational communication scholars can make distinct contributions to the interdisciplinary work and occupations literature. First, I review how organizational communication scholars have approached the concepts of work and occupations to date. Afterwards, I theorize work and occupations as communicative constructions and develop communicative approaches to occupational (de)segregation research. Drawing from the ways in which I conceptualize both difference (see chapter 2) and occupational (de)segregation, I then proceed to articulate the research questions that drive
this empirical study about attempts to increase the representation of women in “computing and I.T.” work.

**Communication Research on Work and Occupations**

One of the distinctive features of much organizational communication scholarship is that it emphasizes *communicative explanations* to organizational phenomena. Communicative explanations have been defined as “any account that hones our understanding of *how* communication constitutes organizational reality, clarifies *how* communication works as an organizing mechanism, or illuminates communication (rather than, for instance, physical location) as *the* site of organization” (K. L. Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009, p. 23, emphasis in original). As such, communicative explanations to organizations emphasize that communication not only expresses, but generates key organizational realities such as culture, identity, and power. Here, I propose that this line of research can be extended by emphasizing how communication generates *occupational* realities. In particular, I argue that communicative explanations can provide unique and robust explanations to two key aspects of occupational life: (1) how occupations are constituted in the first place; and (2) how certain occupations become associated with particular bodies.

Although, as we have seen, work and occupations have only been minimally problematized in organizational communication research to date, some notable contributions by organizational communication scholars to the
study of work and occupations have appeared and respond to the increasing number of calls to bring work and occupations into the purview of organizational scholarship (K. L. Ashcraft, 2006a, 2008; Barley & Kunda, 2001). What, then, have organizational communication scholars brought to the theorization of work and occupations to date?

Perhaps the most notable and explicit contribution from organizational communication scholars to the study of work and occupations is Ashcraft’s (2007) conceptualization of occupational identity from a rhetorical and thus a communicative lens. By conceptualizing occupational identity in this way, she shows how notions of occupational identity serve as carriers of dominant discourses about “what counts as legitimate work, what tasks matter more and why, who ‘naturally’ belongs in particular jobs, and so forth” (K. L. Ashcraft, 2007, p. 13). In this sense, Ashcraft (2007) brings a distinctively communicative lens to explain occupational segregation. Later in this chapter, I outline in greater detail this approach to occupational identity to explain why conducting critical, discursive analyses of discourses of difference in occupational life is a major contribution that organizational communication scholars can bring to the interdisciplinary literature on work and occupations.

In a vein similar to occupational identity, a number of organizational communication scholars have made contributions to the interdisciplinary literature on professionalization, which is a large component of extant
research on work and occupations. For instance, Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) “advance communication-based understandings of the meanings and practices of professionalism” (p. 146), which complement the dominant sociological understandings of professionalism. In their essay, they argue that professionalism is a contested term and the professional worker is a rhetorical construction (for more on this perspective, see Cheney, Lair, Ritz, & Kendall, 2010). Sullivan (2007), in her dissertation research, also draws from this communication-based understanding of professionalism as she examines dilemmas facing message therapists in their professionalization attempts. In addition, Tretheway (1999) studies professional women and makes note of how discourses of professionalism, which are inherently gendered, get written up on the bodies of professional women. Most notably, she shows how three discourses in particular shape the bodies of the professional women whom she interviewed: a professional body is a fit body; a professional body emits particular signs and messages through bodily comportment, nonverbal behaviors, and performances; and a professional woman’s body is perceived as excessively sexual.

A third area where organizational communication scholars have attended to work and occupations is in studies of what has been termed dirty work. Dirty work refers to “job duties that others likely view as disgusting, degrading, or morally insulting” (Tracy & Scott, 2006, p. 9) and that are thus plagued by a considerable amount of taint. The term dirty work can be used
to refer to workers in a variety of diverse occupations that are considered to be either physically (e.g., garbage collectors) or morally (e.g., funeral home directors) difficult. In their study, Tracy and Scott (2006) examine how members of two occupations that have a considerable amount of taint engage in identity work: firefighters and correctional officers. These authors demonstrate that firefighters and correctional officers combat taint in different ways because they are not able to draw upon the same discourses to combat taint. More specifically, “discourses of occupational prestige and masculine heterosexuality allow firefighters to frame their work in preferred, privileged terms while correctional officers struggle to combat taint discursively associated with low-level feminized care work or with brutish, deviant sexuality” (Tracy & Scott, 2006, p. 6). In sum, Tracy and Scott (2006) demonstrate how the work identities of individuals are constructed through both societal discourses and organizational norms. As such, they examine organizational communication beyond the bounds of organizations, just as Ashcraft (2007) does in her conceptualization of occupational identity and Cheney and Ashcraft (2007) do in their conceptualization of the “professional” worker through a rhetorical lens. In a more recent study on dirty work, Lucas (2011) adopts a similar approach by showing how workers in dirty occupations draw on particular discourses, most notably that “all jobs are important and valuable, dignity is located in the quality of the job performed;
and dignity emerges from the way people treat and are treated by others” (p. 353), in order to reconcile their work identity with their personal identity.

One last area where organizational communication scholars have contributed to the study of work and occupations thus far is by examining issues of control and resistance in particular lines of work. In this regard, Murphy (1998, 2003) has made contributions about control and resistance in two occupational fields: flight attendants and strippers. First, in her study of strippers, Murphy (2003) demonstrates how stripper identities are more complex than either an objective or subjective presentation of their selves for different audiences. Rather, strippers are simultaneously both subjects and objects of power. Second, in her study of flight attendants, Murphy (1998) documents how flight attendants are able to resist supervisory power behind closed doors. This study contributes work and occupations research because it shows how workers in a line of work are able to resist the expectations that are placed upon them and that emanate both from larger societal discourses and organizational norms, such as the expectation that they defer to the power and authority that are associated with pilots.

So far in this chapter, I have argued that although the study of work and occupations has not been a major concern for organizational communication research in general, organizational communication scholars can nevertheless make (and have made) important contributions to this interdisciplinary literature. But what does occupation mean from a
communication perspective? This is a complex question that cannot be answered simply, as demonstrated by the longstanding and still largely unanswered organizational communication debate on the question: what is an organization? (Robichaud & Cooren, 2013; J. R. Taylor & Van Every, 2000, 2011). In the next section, I outline some key premises of what it entails to conceptualize occupations from a communication perspective.

The Communicative Construction of Work and Occupations

Fine (1996) defines occupations as collections of tasks and assignments that are performed in an organizational environment. Because collections of tasks and assignments can be formed around very different activities, occupations are incredibly diverse and include both crafts (e.g., carpentry, plumbing, electrical work, and baking) and professions (e.g., medicine and law) (Trice, 1993). One distinguishing feature of occupations is that they claim to control a specific set of tasks, as well as “the distinct body of knowledge about how those tasks are to be performed” (Trice, 1993, p. 10). The question thus arises: how do occupations claim control over a specific set of tasks, as well as over bodies of knowledge about how these tasks should be performed?

The concept of occupational rhetoric, heavily rooted in a communication perspective to work and occupations, sheds light on the above question. Occupational rhetoric refers to the communication processes through which workers justify their work and explain to the public why what
they do is important or necessary (G. A. Fine, 1996). By examining occupational rhetoric, we can thus understand the processes through which certain occupations, rather than others, become associated with and claim control over particular tasks. Examining these processes is important because there is nothing natural about why a particular task is deemed the work of one occupational group over another. Witz (1992), for instance, demonstrates how the task of delivering babies, which was originally associated with midwives, was subsequently co-opted by doctors who successfully claimed to have authority over this body of knowledge. As such, her work shows that occupations are broad, relatively malleable discourse formations that arise and evolve through discursive struggles among competing groups who vie for control over a particular set of tasks, as well as the bodies of knowledge surrounding the accomplishment of these tasks. Because tasks and bodies of knowledge associated with certain occupations today were often associated with different occupations in the past, “we cannot take occupations as given in reality” (Pringle, 1993, p. 131) since the nature of occupations is always subject to change – occupations can arise, decline, experience revival, transform, and even die (Trice, 1993).

Attending to the large and growing interdisciplinary research literature on professionalization processes is helpful to conceptualize the shifting nature of occupations. Abbott’s (1988) model of professionalization is particularly useful when examining how occupations claim authority over
particular bodies of knowledge through rhetorical discourse and thus acquire professional status. He argues that professionalization attempts are always about *claiming jurisdiction* over a particular body of abstract knowledge that is required to accomplish a set of tasks. Professions thus arise by workers in a particular occupation successfully arguing that they, and only they, have access to a particular body of abstract knowledge and are competent to accomplish particular tasks that require that abstract knowledge. Abbott (1988) argues that these claims are made in public media, legal discourse, and in workplace negotiation and are directed to a variety of audiences, including clients (Alvesson, 1994). Professionalization is thus seen as a contested, multi-sited phenomenon in which occupational members and leaders struggle to establish meanings of their work in ways that will benefit them (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Cheney et al., 2010).

An important implication of Abbott’s model is that professionalization projects are seen as being attempts to achieve exclusivity and professional closure. For instance, not just anyone can become a member of a given profession; certain criteria must be met before any given individual can claim to do professional work or to be a practitioner of a certain profession (Abbott, 1988; K. L. Ashcraft, 2008; K. L. Ashcraft et al., 2012; Bloor & Dawson, 1994; Witz, 1992). A second important implication of theorizing professionalization in this way is that there is nothing inherent about what type of work professionals actually do; rather, professionals can do *any* work, as long as
they have successfully labeled it as ‘professional’ by claiming control over a particular body of knowledge. In this sense, it is not that the work associated with professions is inherently different from work that considered to be professional; rather, the difference between professional work and other types of work is that professional work is simply *perceived* to be more knowledge-intensive and exclusive than other types of work (Abbott, 1988; Rennstam & Ashcraft, forthcoming). Because most types of work can be claimed as professional, the question is not “*what* is a profession, but *when* is a profession” (G. A. Fine, 1996, p. 96) – in other words, when have members of a particular occupational group succeeded in their attempts to present themselves as professionals and as having control over an abstract body of knowledge? Professions are thus part of a sociopolitical process, mediated through discourse, in which workers make claims to control bodies of abstract knowledge to reap the benefits associated with professionalism (G. A. Fine, 1996), including “increased social status, greater autonomy, improved opportunities for advancement, and better pay” (Ensmenger, 2001, p. 61).

A communication-centered perspective can extend Abbott’s professionalization model in important ways. For instance, whereas Abbott (1988) does argue that professional justifications can be claimed through the rhetorical strategy of reduction, which consists of one occupational group arguing that another task is reducible to the work that it already does and that this group should therefore have control over it as well, he does not
demonstrate how these reductionist claims are made in actual communication practices, nor how claims to professionalism are made through a multitude of rhetorical strategies. Indeed, he argues that the form and content of the rhetorical strategies used to make claims to professionalism are not especially important. However, without attending to the form and content of these strategies, our knowledge about professionalization processes is limited because we know little about which actors make claims, though which media these claims are made, the nature of the rhetorical strategies that are used to secure professionalization status, and how these claims are received and appropriated by various audiences. A communication-centered approach to work and occupations is amenable to providing such explanations by examining how professionalization is achieved in actual communication practices. Such an approach also moves away from viewing rhetoric as a merely instrumental way of achieving a goal like professionalization, as Abbott’s model implies, to viewing professionalization as a multi-sited constitutive process that is achieved through discursive activity implicating many actors, often with competing aims (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Cheney et al., 2010). This constitutive approach underscores that claims to professionalism cannot be reduced to a specific rhetorical strategy (i.e., reductionism), as Abbott (1988) suggests, because these claims can always be contested by various actors. Thus, from a constitutive perspective, professionalization is a complex, ongoing process in which many
actors participate, not only those who are seeking professional status (K. L. Ashcraft, 2013; Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Cheney et al., 2010).

In the way that I have theorized occupations and professions, occupational and professional boundaries are malleable and ever shifting as groups rhetorically claim jurisdiction over particular bodies of knowledge, tasks, and activities. Professionalism thus involves exclusivity: showing that only a certain group of people have access to a body of complex, abstract knowledge that is required to accomplish particular tasks (Abbott, 1988; MacDonald, 1995). However, research on professionalism has increasingly shown that claims to professional exclusivity are not just about knowledge; they are also about the social identities of professionals themselves (Arndt & Bigelow, 2005; K. L. Ashcraft, 2013; Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Kirkham & Loft, 1993; Witz, 1992). This research thus substantiates the claim of feminist theorists, such as Iris Marion Young (1990), who claimed more than twenty years ago that:

Some professions, which tend to be dominated by women, are considered of lower value by the prevailing standard of intelligence; their work is considered less ‘scientific,’ and they are often seen as tied to the body and need: teaching young children, social work, nursing. The current hierarchal division of labor tends to ignore intelligence and skill that have different and in some ways incomparable forms” (p. 22).

Professionalization projects and occupational segregation can thus be seen as in a mutually constitutive relationship with each other, a relationship that I shall now explore.
Communicative Approaches to Occupational Segregation

As discussed in Chapter 1, occupational segregation refers to the extent to which certain types of work and occupations are associated with workers whose bodies are socially marked along the lines of various categories of difference, especially sex and race. Occupational segregation is a pervasive, salient feature of today’s labor market around the world (Charles & Grusky, 2004; Williams, 1995).

Given the complexity and pervasiveness of occupational segregation, there is a huge amount of interdisciplinary literature on this phenomenon. Earlier, we saw that occupational segregation has mostly been examined through post-positivist metatheoretical assumptions and the use of quantitative methods in order to account for contemporary and historical trends in the labor market across lines of sex, race, and class in a variety of national contexts (e.g., Charles & Grusky, 2004; Kaufman, 2010; McCall, 2001; Reskin & Roos, 1990; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). However, a tradition of qualitative research on occupational segregation, which tends to focus on the discursive processes through which occupations are constituted in ways that associate them with bodies marked along socially significant lines, has also been emerging (e.g., Arndt & Bigelow, 2005; K. L. Ashcraft, 2007; Kirkham & Loft, 1993; Witz, 1992). To date, this research has generated significant insights on two key phenomena related to occupational segregation: (1) the shifting nature of segregation patterns across historical
and cultural contexts; and (2) the relationship between an occupational field’s status and the gender and race profiles of its workforce.

First, there is no doubt among scholars of occupational segregation that segregation patterns are very dynamic and constantly evolving. For instance, workers in gender-congruent occupations today could have been doing the same work in a different historical period or cultural context, but their work would be categorized as gender-atypical (Simpson, 2009; Witz, 1992). Thus, although occupational segregation is a very persistent pattern (Acker, 1990), jobs that at one time are seen as appropriate for some groups may at another time be seen as most appropriate for other groups. Indeed, “most of the so-called ‘feminized’ jobs now dominated by women were at some stage thought to be suitable for men” (Simpson, 2009, p. 6). The association of certain jobs with particular social and cultural groups is thus very malleable, as Pringle (1993) notes by claiming that while secretarial work is seen today as women’s work par excellence, it wasn’t until the 1950s that secretarial work began to be perceived as gender-atypical work for men. Because a similar pattern can be seen in computer science, Ensmenger (2010b) argues that instead of asking why women are so underrepresented in this field, it is more appropriate to ask how computer work, which began as so-called women’s work, became what is seen today as men’s work.

Communicational explanations for explaining the dynamic and shifting nature of occupational segregation patterns are particularly robust. Indeed,
if computer science had to be *made* masculine, as Ensmenger (2010b) claims, then this field had to become associated with men through occupational rhetoric that portrays certain bodies as being more suited than others to this particular line of work (G. A. Fine, 1996). Viewed through this communication lens, one can see how the gender designations of jobs are malleable (Leidner, 1991) and that gender designations of jobs, as well as the segregation patterns that stem from these designations, are social constructions that are maintained through communication (K. L. Ashcraft, 2007, 2008).

Second, organizational communication scholars of identity and difference can also make important contributions to the interdisciplinary occupational segregation literature by providing communication explanations to the links between occupational status and occupational segregation. In this regard, extant research suggests that occupations constructed as white men’s work often receive higher pay and social status than work associated with both women and people of color. In addition, this research shows that positions associated with power, authority, and supervision tend to be associated with white men, whereas positions associated with women and people of color tend to carry less power and authority (Simpson, 2009; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993; Williams, 1995; Wingfield, 2009). Research has also shown that even regardless of the tasks associated with the occupation, a given occupation’s status and salary is increased when there is a high
presence of white men (Leidner, 1991; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993; Weeden, 2002; Williams, 1995). In sum, white men often benefit from segregation, whereas women and people of color tend to be disadvantaged by it.

Returning to the earlier literature on professionalization is helpful to theorize the equation of higher occupational status with a greater concentration of men. As discussed earlier, achieving professional status requires demonstrating that only certain people can do the job. Indeed, if anyone can do a particular job, then workers are easily replaceable – a situation antithetical to professional discourse, which tends to brand professional workers as precious goods that cannot easily be replaced (K. L. Ashcraft, 2011, 2013). How, then, is it possible to show that only certain people can do the job? Whereas many professionalization scholars have historically argued that showing that only certain people can do the job is about demonstrating that only workers in a given profession have access to an abstract body of knowledge that is required to perform certain tasks (e.g., Abbott, 1988), another important way has been to invoke social identities such as gender and race. Claims to professionalism are thus not only about claims to knowledge, but about the social identities of the people who are said to have access to that knowledge (K. L. Ashcraft, 2008, 2013; K. L. Ashcraft et al., 2012). In this sense, professionalization efforts and occupational segregation are mutually constitutive, since making claims that only certain
people (e.g., white men) can do a particular job have led to the creation of segregation patterns in many professions.

The mutually constitutive relationship between professionalization and occupational segregation is particularly clear in research showing that the gender profile of the workers in a given occupation impact whether this occupation is successfully branded as professional. In sum, the more men in a given occupation, the more likely it is to successfully brand itself as professional (K. L. Ashcraft, 2007; Ensmenger, 2010b; Kerfoot, 2002). This has led scholars to arguing that the distinctions between professional work and semi-professional work is more about the distinction between work associated with men (professional) and work associated with women (semi-professional) than about any concrete differences in the nature of the work (Abbott, 1998; Hearn, 1982). Witz (1992) concurs, arguing that the very definition of a 'semi-profession' is “an occupation located within a bureaucratic organization and one in which women predominate” rather than men (p. 60, emphasis added). Williams (1995) even shows how female-dominated occupational leaders have attempted to recruit men in their quest to professionalize, recognizing that having more male occupational members could make their claims to professional status more tenable than if their occupational members remained overwhelmingly women. Similarly, the professionalization attempts of computer scientists as early as the 1960s have been cited as contributing to the male-dominated nature of this field, since in
attempting to professionalize, the computer programming community was actively “making itself masculine” and turning a field that had previously been open to women into “one of the most stereotypically male professions” (Ensmenger, 2010b, p. 116).

A wealth of research in various occupational contexts, including medicine, aviation, computing, and accounting, has empirically shown that professional identities have been shown to imply white, male bodies (K. L. Ashcraft, 2007; K. L. Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004b; Ensmenger, 2010b; Kerfoot, 2002; Kirkham & Loft, 1993; Witz, 1992) that are also heterosexual (Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009). As a result, it is difficult for particular groups, especially women and people of color, to claim professional identities since the latter have been rhetorically constructed so as to associate professionalism with white, heterosexual masculinity (Dent & Whitehead, 2002). Conversely, extant research has shown that occupations where these groups predominate tend to be devalued (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). This leads Ashcraft (2011) to argue that “cultural notions of worthwhile work/places stem at least in part from the historical inclusion and exclusion of certain people” (p. 7), with the inclusion of white men and the exclusion of women and people of color being key ingredients to constructing work that is deemed worthwhile, prestigious, and professional.

But how do practitioners attempting to professionalize a given occupation go about showing that their line of work is “white men’s work” in
order to bolster their claims to professionalism? As I now discuss, this process has been recently theorized through the intertwined concepts of occupational identity and occupational branding (e.g., K. L. Ashcraft, 2013; K. L. Ashcraft et al., 2012).

*Occupational Identity*

Outside of communication studies and in the realm of occupational science, occupational identity theory has traditionally emphasized “the individual self as having control over its identity” (Phelan & Kinsella, 2009, p. 86). However, Ashcraft’s (2007, 2013) communication-centered conceptualization of occupational identity views this concept in a different way that offers distinctive contributions. She shows, for instance, that conceiving of occupational identities as constructed only by workers in a given occupational field fails to recognize that occupations have social identities and that these social identities shape the nature of the work, the value associated with the work, and who enters certain lines of work in the first place. Conceiving of occupational identity in *collective* rather than solely individual terms thus underscores that occupational identities can “take on a life of their own” (K. L. Ashcraft, 2013, p. 18) and are thus not solely constructed by workers in a given occupation. Indeed, occupational identity, or the identity of work, arises through both the discourse of workers in a particular field and larger societal discourses that transcend multiple organizational contexts, including but not limited to professional
associations, educational institutions, workplaces, popular culture, and families.

Ashcraft (2007) emphasizes collective occupational identity when defining it as “an ongoing rhetorical endeavor – occurring across time and space, across macro- and micro-messages, across institutions and actors, and in response to lived exigencies and material possibilities – that functions to organize job segregation in large part by marshalling discourses of difference” (p. 10, emphasis in original). As mentioned earlier, notions of occupational identity thus serve as a carrier of dominant discourses about the value of work and who should be doing which types of work. Furthermore, occupational identity is conceptualized as being strategically co-produced by various actors in order to achieve particular outcomes. One of these outcomes is often to increase occupational status by associating a given occupation with particular bodies, since, as previously discussed, white, male bodies have been shown to bring higher status and value to many occupations. This is the basis of glass slipper theory, which provides particularly robust explanations for occupational segregation that stem from a communication-based theorization of occupational identity (K. L. Ashcraft, 2013). According to glass slipper theory, collective notions of occupational identity are aligned with particular embodied social identities. As a result, some people’s social identities align better with certain types of work (e.g., white men in upper administration), whereas other people’s social identities fit better with other
types of work (e.g., white women and grade-school teaching). The glass slipper metaphor underscores that certain types of work “fit” individuals with certain social identities better than others, whereas individuals with other social identities have a harder time fitting into certain lines of work because the work was intentionally made to not fit them (K. L. Ashcraft, 2013).

Glass slipper theory offers a powerful metaphor through which to understand the associations of socially marked bodies with particular forms of work. However, this theory invokes the important question of how certain types of work become associated with particular social identities in the first place. To answer this question, I now turn to the concept of occupational branding, which enables communication scholars to theorize occupational segregation processes through a discursive lens (K. L. Ashcraft et al., 2012).

**Occupational Branding**

Although branding is a nascent concept in organizational communication studies, branding has been studied extensively in marketing, public relations, and promotion since the mid-19th century (Lair, Sullivan, & Cheney, 2005). In common parlance, branding is generally used to represent attempts “to make direct, clear, and persistent bonds between symbols and products or services” (Lair et al., 2005, p. 311). However, branding can also be defined more broadly and used, as it has been in the organizational communication and organization studies literatures, “not as a marketing tool,
but rather as a way of expressing preferred values and meanings” (Kärreman & Rylander, 2008, p. 107).

Organizational scholars first relied on the concept of branding to examine organizational identity. To this end, a considerable amount of research has shown that corporate branding efforts are frequently undertaken by management in order to align the identities of organizational members with the identity of the organization’s brand. As such, corporate branding efforts are directed to organizational members in hopes that the latter will adopt and enact the organizational identities that are implied by the corporate brand because the enactment of these identities is presumed to promote organizational interests (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Collinson, 2003). When corporate branding efforts are successful, they play an important role in recruiting organizational members who, prior to their entrance in the organization, engage in personal branding efforts (Kärreman & Rylander, 2008; Lair et al., 2005). The latter refer to how both organizational members and individuals who aspire to become organizational members brand themselves in ways that are congruent with the organizational identities that are implied by management’s corporate branding efforts.

Drawing from existing research on corporate and personal branding in organizational settings, occupational identities have recently been conceptualized as being intrinsically linked to occupational branding efforts.
Occupational branding is defined as strategic work on crafting the identity of work in particular ways, such as portraying a certain line of work in a positive light so as to increased its associated value (K. L. Ashcraft et al., 2012). Professionalization efforts that use strategic discourse to bring value to a given occupation by associating certain bodies (e.g., white men) with a particular occupation can thus be conceptualized as occupational branding campaigns. The value of a branding lens lies in that it underscores that occupations strategically brand themselves to particular groups of people rather than others in order to achieve particular goals, such as professionalization. The aim of professionalization efforts is thus to build “a habitual association between an occupation and a preferred distilled image” (K. L. Ashcraft et al., 2012, p. 468) of not only the work itself, but of the workers to whom the work is branded. To this end, occupational branding efforts have mostly been undertaken to associate certain lines of work with white, male bodies because, as discussed earlier, these bodies have been perceived as elevating the status of occupations.

Several examples of occupational branding efforts can be found in existing research on work and occupations. For example, Arndt and Bigelow (2005) demonstrate that the sex composition of hospital administrators was initially female-dominated. However, in order to reap potential benefits that could arise from professionalization, including higher salaries, hospital administrators began to make a link between the field of hospital
administration and ‘men’s work’. In other words, although women were dominant in the field at the time, a professional association was developed that sought to associate this work with men. Associating hospital administration with men required successfully sex-typing the field as masculine. Here, sex-typing refers to the process through which certain organizations or occupations come to be associated with either masculine and/or feminine characteristics (Britton, 2000). The desire to sex-type the field as masculine required hospital administrators to engage in occupational branding efforts, which were successful: after they had successfully branded the occupation as ‘men’s work’, men began to enter hospital administration en masse and the field achieved professional status (Arndt & Bigelow, 2005). Arndt and Bigelo’s (2005) study is important in that it demonstrates that occupational branding efforts can have important, tangible consequences on both the profile of workers in a given field and the value associated with a particular line of work. Indeed, these efforts contributed to men taking over the previously female-dominated work of hospital administrators, as well as to achieving professional status for this occupation.

Strategic occupational branding efforts have also been documented in the context of aviation. For instance, research on the U.S. commercial airline pilot demonstrates how, at the turn of the 20th century, the pilot was largely seen as “a lone, rugged, risk-taking, hot-tempered daredevil” (K. L. Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004b, p. 134). However, many people in the general public felt
insecure about flying with pilots because of the way that their collective identity was constructed. Consequently, the pilot’s occupational identity was rebranded in order to make room for the ‘lady-flier’ or ‘lady-bird’ in order to reassure the public that flying was safe. Incorporating women into the pilot’s occupational identity was strategic, as it was assumed that if the public saw that women could fly, people would assume that anyone can do it and that it is not dangerous. However, as the public became more comfortable with aviation and in order for pilots to elevate the status of their occupation, discourses on professionalism became intertwined with the occupational identity of the airline pilot. Women consequently became excluded from the occupation in order to facilitate the professionalization efforts of pilots, whose occupational identity came to be associated with a particular form of white masculinity: one that is “commanding, civilized, scientific, technical, heterosexual, and paternal” (K. L. Ashcraft, 2007, p. 18). The occupational identity of the airline pilot has thus evolved over time through different occupational branding campaigns that all had specific purposes.

Similar findings have also been found in both accounting and in the medical field. Kirkham and Loft (1993), for instance, document how accountants, in their quest for professional status, constructed themselves against bookkeepers and, in the process, sex-typed bookkeepers as women and accountants as men (Kirkham & Loft, 1993). The discourses that constructed the professional accountant as a man were deployed strategically
in order to elevate the status of the profession, whereas bookkeepers were constructed as women and as doing less important work even though professional accountants were dependent upon the work of bookkeepers for their success (Davies, 1996). In addition, Witz (1992) demonstrates how the professionalization of doctors – or ‘medical men’ – in Britain was facilitated by the sex-composition of the field, with men being dominant. These medical men were able to successfully brand themselves as professional workers even though they were essentially co-opting much of the work that had previously been done by female midwives, who had not achieved professional status. This leads Witz (1992) to suggesting that the doctors’ professional status was at least partially achieved because of doctors being men.

Thus far, we have seen the value of theorizing occupational segregation through the intertwined concepts of occupational identity and occupational branding. However, an important limitation to the analysis thus far has been that we have only theorized occupational branding campaigns that have been undertaken to associate certain lines of work with white, male bodies with the aim of achieving professional status – thereby producing occupational segregation. Of course, examining such campaigns is crucial to advancing our understanding of occupational segregation, especially since most occupational branding campaigns have been undertaken to produce segregation rather than to curb it. However, it follows that if occupational segregation can be produced through occupational
branding, occupational desegregation can also occur through this process. We can thus pose the question: what happens when the tables are turned and an occupational branding campaign is specifically developed to curb segregation and promote diversity and inclusivity in a particular field? In the next section, I elaborate on this question in theorizing occupational rebranding as a communicative approach to desegregation.

**Occupational Rebranding as a Communicative Approach to Desegregation**

Because occupational segregation is an important social problem, as I discussed in Chapter 1, many practitioners today are continuing to work on achieving greater diversity and inclusivity in currently segregated occupations, although their primary focus has been getting more women into male-dominated occupations rather than encouraging more men to enter female-dominated occupations. The focus on getting more women into male-dominated occupations is likely because there is more incentive for women to enter male-dominated occupations, which tend to have higher pay and status, than for men to enter female-dominated occupations. As such, diversity is framed as an equity problem that will be resolved by getting more women into higher paying male-dominated fields (for more on this perspective, see K. L. Ashcraft et al., 2012).

However, our previous review of occupational segregation research shows that this way of going about curbing occupational segregation – in a
nutshell, encouraging women to enter higher paid male-dominated fields without attending to the occupational identity of these respective fields – is problematic for many reasons. First, it doesn’t take into account the basis on which these male-dominated fields were able to secure higher status and pay in the first place, which, as we have seen, is very much linked to men being dominant in the field as opposed to the actual complexity of the work performed (Abbott, 1998; K. L. Ashcraft, 2013; G. A. Fine, 1996; Weeden, 2002). Second, this way of going about curbing occupational segregation neglects glass slipper theory and the notion of collective occupational identity. Indeed, we have seen that many occupations have been strategically made to “fit” some groups of people rather than others. In this sense, efforts to get more women and other underrepresented groups into an occupation that was specifically made not to fit them may be self-defeating (K. L. Ashcraft, 2011). Third, attempting to achieve greater wage equality in this way doesn’t problematize why female-dominated occupations are lower-paid (e.g., not because of lower task complexity, but because of the female-dominated nature of these fields) or seek to improve the status and wages of women in these fields. In order to achieve greater wage equality between women and men, women are thus told to just do the same work that men do, as opposed to making the case for why work traditionally associated with women should have higher value in the first place. Fourth, even if efforts at getting more women into these higher paid male occupations are successful,
it is likely that men would continue to occupying the positions at the top of the occupational ladder with women at the bottom because of what Williams (1995) calls the glass escalator effect. Fifth, there is the potential that if women start to increasingly penetrate a currently-segregated male occupation, the salary and status of this field will actually diminish as men become less dominant, thereby not achieving the wage equality that is one of the principal reasons invoked for curbing occupational segregation in the first place (Wright & Jacobs, 1994).

Perhaps most importantly, a notable limitation to existing approaches to occupational segregation is that this research tends to assume that increasing the number of women in a male-dominated occupation such as “computing and I.T.” will make it better for all women in this field. However, this goes against a whole line of research that shows how the problem of women’s inclusivity in male-dominated occupations is much more complex, since women can make work environments just as uncomfortable for other women as men do (K. L. Ashcraft & Pacanowsky, 1996; Dryburgh, 1999; Irvine & Vermilya, 2010; Mumby, 1997b; Scott-Dixon, 2004; Townsley & Geist, 2000). Focusing solely on the numbers of female or male bodies in a given occupation neglects that whether a particular group composed of people with similar bodily features feels included isn’t just related to groups of people with different bodily features than them, but to everyday communicative accomplishments and performances of identity.
The above discussion demonstrates that there are many known problems with attempting to curb occupational segregation and achieve wage equality through simply getting more women into male-dominated occupations without interrogating the nature of the work itself and how it has been constructed in ways to exclude certain social groups. I argue here that the notions of occupational identity and occupational branding offer more viable, promising avenues for practitioners seeking to curb segregation patterns. From this perspective, collective notions of occupational identity must be changed in order to increase occupational diversity. In this regard, occupational branding campaigns to diversify currently segregated occupations by changing collective notions of occupational identity are not uncommon, even if they are less documented than occupational branding campaigns to produce segregation. Scott-Dixon (2004) offers an example of such a campaign when she states: “As I ride the subway or walk through the streets of Toronto, I am often confronted by a series of advertisements that feature young, attractive, multi-racial, multi-national people who have improved their lives by improving their IT skills” (p. 65). She notes that these advertisements are from colleges who are seeking diversify their student body in the field of “computing and I.T.”.

Specific organizations whose explicit aim and raison d’être is the diversification of currently segregated occupations also exist. For instance, the mission of NCWIT is to shatter the association of “computing and I.T.”
with male bodies by increasing the representation of women in this field at all levels, including in K-12 education, in academia, and in the corporate world. As mentioned earlier, one of the ways by which NCWIT is going about achieving this goal is by shaping public discourse around “computing and I.T.” work through a marketing campaign entitled “Sit With Me.” I conceptualize “Sit With Me” as an occupational rebranding campaign whose purpose is to desegregate the field of “computing and I.T.”, as it strategically attempts to associate diverse bodies with computing related occupations by reconstructing the occupational identity of this field. The notion of rebranding, rather than simply branding, emphasizes that although this field’s current brand revolves around white male workers, the goal of NCWIT and its “Sit With Me” campaign is to change that brand, thereby rebranding it. As such, I conceptualize occupational rebranding as a communicative approach to understanding occupational desegregation and occupational branding as a communicative approach to understanding how occupations become segregated in the first place.

Further theorizing occupational rebranding for desegregation is crucial in order to better understand how practitioners who seek to rebrand work for diversity and inclusivity go about this process, who and what are involved in this process, how discursive struggles arise between the various actors who are implicated in the rebranding process, and how these discursive struggles are communicatively managed. As discussed earlier, occupational identities
are not simply imposed by workers in a given occupation or by a professional association. Multiple actors are engaged in both occupational branding and rebranding, including workers, employers, diversity practitioners, and even filmmakers who depict occupations. Indeed, occupational discourses traverse multiple sites—workplaces, professional associations, educational institutions, popular culture, and families—and these multiple sites may generate vastly different discourses about what workers in a given occupation do and who should be doing that work (K. L. Ashcraft et al., 2012). Because communication is a fundamentally political process and that all individuals have different interests that lead them to articulating discourses in particular ways (Deetz, 1992), the multiple actors who contribute to generating occupational identities and (re)branding occupations are unlikely to construct occupational identities and (re)brand occupations in the same way. In the case of “Sit With Me,” for instance, some actors argue that more women are needed in “computing and I.T.” because women are fundamentally different from men, whereas other actors are strongly against making comments that put all women in one camp and all men in another. Research is thus needed to examine how the process of occupational rebranding implicates discursive struggles between actors with competing interests and worldviews, as well as if and how these tensions can be managed in order to maintain the coherency and ensure the success of rebranding campaigns such as “Sit With Me.”
In addition to examining who is involved in rebranding processes, it is equally important to examine what is involved. For instance, objects such as the uniforms of workers and the machines that they use also shape meanings of collective occupational identities and can thus contribute to occupational branding for segregation or occupational rebranding for desegregation (Abbott, 1988; K. L. Ashcraft et al., 2012). These objects can be seen as artifacts, which refer to “anything that one can see, hear, or feel” (Keyton, 2005, p. 23) and that have symbolic value. One particular artifact is a central organizing element of NCWIT’s “Sit With Me” campaign: a red chair. In the campaign, which I describe in greater detail in Chapter 4, the chair is an artifact whose meaning is fought over and contested because of the meanings that the campaign itself has among multiple actors. The chair thus becomes spoken for, or, in the terms of Cooren (2010), ventriloquized in multiple, contradictory ways, thereby acquiring multiple meanings. In my analysis, I thus explore how the discursive struggles surrounding “Sit With Me” are mediated through the artifact that is the red chair.

In addition to exploring the processes through which occupational rebranding campaigns take form, we also need to know more about the messages that surround these campaigns and how they implicate difference. As discussed in Chapter 2, there are a wide variety of stances on difference: the idea that difference organizes discourse, that discourse organizes difference, that organizing processes discursively privilege some differences
over others, that discourse about organizing privileges some differences over others, and that organizational discourse fundamentally destabilizes difference. The ways in which occupational rebranding campaigns construct difference are particularly important because tensions of inclusivity and exclusivity are inherent to these constructions: which underrepresented groups will a rebranding campaign explicitly include and/or tacitly exclude? For instance, will a campaign be exclusively focused upon one form of difference or many? Is it possible for an occupational rebranding campaign to construct difference in ways that are inclusive of people with a vast array of social identities? Is it possible to reconstruct an occupation as being a particularly novel and interesting line of work for a currently underrepresented group without reifying what it means to be a part of this group and relying upon essentialist arguments? Furthermore, if essentialist arguments about particular social groups are present in occupational rebranding discourse, what are the potential consequences of these arguments and do they help or hurt the underrepresented groups that are being targeted by the campaign? What are the consequences of the campaign’s constructions of difference for the campaign’s ultimate goal of occupational desegregation (that is, will these constructions of difference effectively desegregate the occupation or desegregate it only along the lines of one form of difference such as sex)? And are desegregation efforts geared fundamentally towards bodily features (e.g., the problem of diversity in
“computing and I.T.” is that there are not enough female bodies) or discursive performances (e.g., the problem of diversity is that difference, as it is discursively performed in everyday discourse, creates a hostile environment for many people, who can be both women and men)? These are all crucial questions that must be addressed when theorizing occupational rebranding for diversity because of the complex and multifaceted meanings that the concept of difference embodies.

Above, I have presented a number of questions that remain unanswered about occupational rebranding and that scholars and practitioners must further examine to better understand and manage the tensions that are inherent to occupational desegregation attempts. In the next and final section of this chapter, I formulate two distinct research questions that drive my study and its quest to develop new knowledge about the complexities surrounding occupational (de)segregation research and practice.

**Research Questions**

So far in this chapter, I have made the case for why we need research that examines the processes through which currently segregated occupations can be rebranded, the discursive struggles that are inherent in efforts to rebrand currently segregated occupations for diversity and inclusivity, and the implications of constructions of difference in occupational rebranding campaigns. This leads me to formulate the following two research questions,
which I presented in Chapter 1 and which enable me to use NCWIT's “Sit With Me” campaign as a case to theorize occupational rebranding campaigns:

RQ1: How does NCWIT's “Sit With Me” campaign rebrand “computing and I.T.” work for gender diversity and what discursive struggles are involved in this rebranding process?

RQ2: What are the consequences of the discourse surrounding the “Sit With Me” campaign for relations of difference and the campaign’s goal of occupational desegregation?

The first research question is designed to focus on the process of NCWIT's rebranding practices and to examine the discursive struggles that surfaced during the process of developing a campaign that was attempting to help desegregate the field of “computing and I.T.”. Attending to this question will thus shed light on the multiplicity of actors that participate in “Sit With Me,” the multiple reasons why these actors participate in the campaign, and how the meanings of the campaign are contested, (re)shaped, and fragmented through a wide variety of discursive practices. In Chapter 5 of this dissertation, I address this research question by investigating how the meanings of occupational rebranding campaigns are far from unified and how the various actors who participate in these campaigns manage the tensions that arise when the campaign takes on multiple, contradictory meanings.

The second research question aims to shed light on the content of the “Sit With Me” campaign and its messages. As such, this question will enable me to investigate the multiple stances on difference that are taken by the various actors that participate in the campaign. Because the participants are
so diverse and come from very different backgrounds, it is very likely that a wide variety of stances on difference will be represented in the discourse surrounding the campaign. But what are the multiple ways in which various facets of difference, such as gender, race, sexuality, and ability status, are constructed in the context of “Sit With Me”? Are differences constructed in terms of bodily features or discursive performances? What are the consequences of these identity constructions? For instance, do these identity constructions serve to reify or deconstruct identity categories and notions of difference? And how could the campaign’s construct difference otherwise, such as through an alternative, queer theory stance on difference? These are all questions that my second research question will enable me to examine and which I explore in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

Above, I have argued that my two research questions are well suited to make important contributions to the interdisciplinary literature on occupational (de)segregation by exploring how currently segregated occupations can be rebranded, the discursive struggles that are inherent in efforts to rebrand currently segregated occupations for diversity and inclusivity, and the implications of constructions of difference in occupational rebranding campaigns. Because my study is rooted in empirical data that I collected over the course of a two year multi-sited ethnography on the “Sit With Me” campaign, I now turn to describing the campaign in greater detail and outlining the methods through which I collected and analyzed my data.
As we saw in Chapter 3, discourses about occupational life that traverse workplaces, popular culture, families, educational institutions, and professional situations all contribute to sustaining and/or curbing occupational segregation. Indeed, these broad discourses either reinforce or undermine associations between particular types of people and a given occupation. Fully understanding occupational (de)segregation thus requires an analysis that attends to how occupational discourses move through time and space, how they are appropriated by various actors, and how all of these discourses construct both occupations and relations of difference. For these reasons, the data for this study comes from a two year multi-sited ethnography that took me to places where these occupational discourses were negotiated: meetings among practitioners seeking to get more women into “computing and I.T.”, events where computing professionals discussed their field and the importance of increasing the representation of women within it, the website that contains official texts of NCWIT’s “Sit With Me” campaign, and even a few places around Colorado where I’ve come across red chairs that are analogous to the symbolic red chair that is at the heart of “Sit With Me.”

In this chapter, I first provide additional background information on NCWIT and its “Sit With Me” campaign, which has served as the case
through which I theorize difference and occupational (de)segregation in this study. Afterwards, I outline the principles of the multi-sited ethnographic approach through which I collected my data, my data analysis procedures, the criteria against which I believe that my study should be evaluated, and my positionality as a researcher during the fieldwork that I conducted.

**Overview of NCWIT and the “Sit With Me” Campaign**

As mentioned previously, NCWIT is a non-profit organization, funded partially through the National Science Foundation, whose explicit aim is to shatter the association of computer science with male bodies by increasing the representation of women in “computing and I.T.”. A fundamental assumption to both NCWIT’s work and its existence as an organization is that current patterns of occupational segregation in “computing and I.T.” are problematic. NCWIT’s website states that NCWIT, as an organization, “believes that greater diversity will create a larger and more competitive workforce, and promote the design of technology that is as broad and innovative as the population it serves” (NCWIT, 2011). One example that NCWIT lists on its website to support its argument that more women are needed in “computing and I.T.” is that the underrepresentation of women leads to deficient technological products, such as speech-recognition technology’s inability to recognize female voices when it was first developed and marketed. NCWIT also argues that “populations traditionally underrepresented in I.T. – minorities, the disabled, and women – bring
unique needs, backgrounds, and ideas to the table, and offer the potential for
technology that is more creative, useful, and competitive with a global
market” (NCWIT, 2012a). Thus, NCWIT’s website does discuss difference
beyond the category “women” even though its name is the National Center for
Women and Information Technology. We also see that there is a practical
and business element to NCWIT’s desire to desegregate computing and IT
work: creating products that will serve more diverse needs and making
companies more competitive.

In working towards its goal of achieving greater diversity in
“computing and I.T.” work, NCWIT is working with hundreds of
organizations. Each of these organizations is an NCWIT member and
belongs to one of NCWIT’s five alliances: the Academic Alliance, the
Workforce Alliance, the Entrepreneurial Alliance, the K-12 Alliance, and the
Affinity Group Alliance. The Academic Alliance alone is composed of over
200 computer science and I.T. departments from institutions of higher
education across the United States, whereas the K-12 Alliance consists of
organizations working with elementary, middle, and high schools. By
contrast, the Workforce Alliance is composed of organizations from the
corporate world, with the Entrepreneurial Alliance consisting of smaller
businesses with less than 100 people. Lastly, the Affinity Group Alliance
includes members from all alliances with the goal of creating a united voice
for women in technology. In addition to these alliances, NCWIT has a Social
Science Advisory Board which is composed of 23 social scientists with various backgrounds and who have affiliations with educational institutions across North America. These social scientists play a crucial role in developing and evaluating the resources that NCWIT creates for its members to help them advance the situation of girls and women in “computing and I.T.” work. As such, they oversee all official texts that NCWIT produces and distributes to the public to ensure that the claims made in these texts are backed up through rigorous social science research.

NCWIT's various alliances create a wide array of resources that can be used by NCWIT member representatives in various ways in their organizations. These resources take many shapes and forms and contain a variety of information, ranging from statistics on women’s participation in “computing and I.T.” work to documents that give advice on how to explain why more women need to be recruited into this field. Several years ago, NCWIT also began to develop the “Sit With Me” campaign, which is a self-avowed occupational rebranding campaign with the following goals: (1) make “computing and I.T.” work more attractive to women; (2) recruit more women into the field; and (3) retain women once they decide to enter the field. This campaign, which emerged from NCWIT’s National Advocacy Committee, has been primarily developed by a team of approximately five NCWIT staff members and two representatives from a social marketing firm that it has hired, although hundreds of representatives from NCWIT affiliated
organizations have participated in the campaign and shaped it in important ways.

One of the main driving messages of the “Sit With Me” campaign is that people sometimes need to sit down to take a stand on an important issue. “Sit With Me” is thus being presented as an opportunity to demonstrate support for women in “computing and I.T.” work through various means. Much of the campaign is based on symbolic action around a red chair, which, as discussed earlier, is a crucial artifact around which the campaign has developed. Hundreds of photos have been taken of various supporters of technical women sitting in the red chair. Dozens of videos of people sitting in the red chair and openly supporting women in “computing and I.T.” work have also been recorded and uploaded to the “Sit With Me” campaign’s official website. On this website, anyone can also write a story about why they support technical women, upload pictures and videos of themselves in a red chair, request that a red chair be sent to their organization, and buy their own red chair. The symbolic value of the red chair is explained in the following terms on the campaign website:

The red chair is symbolic. When women and men “sit” to take a stand, they validate women in computing and IT and recognize them for the important role they play in creating future technology. The red chair gives all of us a constructive way to show our solidarity and invite others to participate. The bold red color grabs attention and encourages action. By “sitting together” we hold space for an honest conversation and create a platform for online and offline discussions about our challenges and hopes for the future. (NCWIT, 2012b)
The “Sit With Me” campaign dates back to 2010, when the social marketing firm that NCWIT hired to spearhead the campaign proposed this idea as a marketing strategy. “Sit With Me” was first presented to representatives from NCWIT member organizations at NCWIT’s 2011 annual summit in New York City, which brought together more than 300 people working to support women in “computing and I.T.” work from hundreds of organizations across the United States. During the two and a half days of the summit, over 80 people got their pictures taken in the red chair and NCWIT hired personnel to interview and record six people discussing their support for technical women while they were sitting in the red chair. More pictures and videos have been taken at other official NCWIT events, such as a fall 2011 Pacesetters\(^2\) meeting in Boulder, the spring 2012 summit in Chicago, as well as at dozens of “red chair events” that have been hosted by NCWIT member representatives at their own organizations.

As we have seen, “Sit With Me” is a concrete example of an occupational rebranding campaign involving many different actors and taking place in multiple venues and sites. By using this campaign as a case study to theorize occupational rebranding, we can learn about how a group of heterogeneous actors all seeking to desegregate “computing and I.T.” go about this process, as well as analyze the discursive tensions and struggles that emanate from these desegregation efforts. Because multiple actors

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\(2\) The Pacesetters program groups NCWIT affiliated organizations that have committed to increasing the numbers of technical women in their organizations.
across various discursive sites participate in “Sit With Me”, I now turn to
describing the methodological procedures that I followed to capture the rich,
multi-sited nature of the discourses surrounding the campaign.

**Introducing Multi-Sited Ethnography**

The knowledge claims that I generate in this study are grounded in
empirical data that I collected through ethnographic methods.

“Ethnography” is an umbrella term that is used to label the practices of
researchers coming from many different traditions, but the shared goal of
ethnographers generally consists in “describing and interpreting the
observable relationships between social practices and systems of meaning”
(Lindlof & Taylor, 2010, p. 134, emphasis in original). In doing so,
ethnographers rely on their own everyday interactions with research
participants and their observations of research participants in making their
knowledge claims (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). The most common data collection
procedure for ethnographic research can thus be referred to as participant
observation, a practice that is attributed to anthropologist Bronislaw
Malinowski (1961) in his study of the Trobriand people in the Kiriwina
Islands. In ethnographic organizational communication research,
researchers have traditionally been participant observers by becoming an
active member of the organization that they are studying, which involves
attending organizational meetings and events and chatting with
organizational members.
Participant observation can also be taken to the next step: assuming the role of an organizational member by participating in the everyday life of the organization and accomplishing the tasks that are expected of organizational members (Czarniawska, 2007). For instance, Van Maanen (1982) was an actual police trainee while collecting the data on a British police organization and Kondo (1990) was an employee at the Japanese confectionary factory where she was collecting data. According to Czarniawska (2007), such studies are “no doubt superior to all other types” (p. 13), but are generally difficult to undertake because of difficulties obtaining access and because of specific qualifications that are often required to become a full-fledged organizational member. However, my study of NCWIT and its “Sit With Me” campaign is based on such a model, as I was an active shaper of and contributor to the campaign during a two year period. Members of the official “Sit With Me” team have consistently asked me for my feedback on multiple stages of the campaign, including on many of the official texts (especially documents and videos) that the campaign team has produced and distributed. In this sense, I performed many of the same duties as my research participants and was largely seen as an organizational member by them.

Traditionally, organizational ethnographies have been conducted in one organizational site. For instance, Kunda’s (2006) acclaimed organizational ethnography examined the organizational culture of an
organization that he named Tech through his role as a participant observer over an extended period. However, Czarniawska (2007) notes that modern organizing tends to take place in multiple sites and contexts rather than in one organization per se. In particular, she notes that “organizing happens in many places at once, and organizers move around quickly and frequently” (Czarniawska, 2007, p. 16). Consequently, several qualitative scholars have been calling for more complex ethnographic methods that account for the increased mobility of contemporary organizational life (Clarke, 2003; Czarniawska, 2007; Marcus, 1995). This has led to the development of multi-sited ethnography, which Marcus (1995) describes as being mobile and taking “unexpected trajectories in tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity” (p. 96) and thus moving ethnography from its conventional single-site location to multiple sites of observation and participation.

Multi-sited ethnography is particularly well suited to my study because of the multi-sited nature of both NCWIT as an organization and its “Sit With Me” campaign. For instance, NCWIT has relatively few staff members and its hundreds of member representatives are dispersed in various corporate and educational institutions across the United States. An ethnographic study of NCWIT and its practices thus requires going beyond what happens in its offices located at the University of Colorado Boulder, since, as one of my participants put it, relatively little happens there. Indeed,
most of NCWIT's work, including the “Sit With Me” campaign that it has been developing, arises through discourses penetrating multiple sites and in conjunction with other organizations with which it is networked. “Sit With Me,” for instance, has been developed in various discursive spaces such as conference calls with participants from across the country, national summits in New York and in Chicago, Pacesetters meetings in Boulder, the campaign’s website, and NCWIT’s offices. My multi-sited ethnographic procedures thus enable me, in line with my research questions listed earlier, to trace the development of the campaign’s discourses across the different sites where they have unfolded, as well as to examine where and how the campaign is unfolding and being appropriated.

In the realm of multi-sited ethnography, shadowing has become an increasingly used technique by which a researcher closely follows an organizational member in her or his day to day activities over an extended period of time (Czarniawska, 2007; S. McDonald, 2005). Czarniawska (2007) notes that a distinct advantage of ethnographic observation through shadowing rather than relying on stationary observation is shadowing’s mobility (Czarniawska, 2007). This mobility is implied in common definitions of this technique: following the people or following the things. Indeed, much shadowing has been based on following people, such as organizational members, in their day to day activities (Marcus, 1995). However, multi-sited ethnographers also often shadow things, or objects, instead of people.
Following the thing (Marcus, 1995) or following objects (Czarniawska, 2007) “involves tracing the circulation through different contexts of a manifestly material object of study” (Marcus, 1995, p. 106) and examining the different meanings that this object acquires as it goes through different contexts. This technique was first developed in studies of science and technology and is associated with actor-network theory (ANT), which conceptualizes agency as the joint property of humans and nonhumans who are in associations with one another. From an ANT perspective, it is thus more accurate to define shadowing as following the actors, as action is seen as being the property of associations of people and objects, both of which are actors (Latour, 2005). Moreover, the practice of shadowing implicates watching how actors move through a particular network and following them wherever they go (Czarniawska, 2007). In this regard, Meunier and Vásquez (2008) make a case for shadowing “the hybrid character of actions” (p. 167) so that researchers can account for both the multi-sited nature of action and how organizational action is linked to associations of both humans and nonhumans.

Although shadowing nonhuman actors is a methodological practice often associated with studies of science and technology, it has been increasingly used by organizational ethnographers. One of the first organizational researchers to discuss the methodological implications of shadowing nonhuman actors was Bruni (2005), who conducted a four-month
ethnography in which he shadowed software that was being developed and used at a hospital. His procedure consisted in “letting the software guide [him] through the organization and confront [him] with other actors and processes, whether human or artificial” (p. 363). He makes the case for extending shadowing to nonhuman objects, as well as people, by demonstrating how objects “mark out trajectories for human action” (Bruni, 2005, p. 370). For instance, although the software program that he shadowed was designed by a team of information engineers and doctors, the program took a life of its own and began to compel actors to use it in particular ways. Consequently, Bruni (2005) argues that shadowing objects entails tracing the creation of objects and how they influence the course of action of other human and nonhuman actions.

Shadowing nonhuman actors does not necessarily imply shadowing objects. For instance Vásquez (2009) shadowed a vast project of science and technology diffusion in a Chilean governmental organization for her dissertation research. She notes that “instead of following the individuals associated with the project, we decided to shadow the planning, management, execution, and evaluation activities by which the project came into existence” (Meunier & Vásquez, 2008, p. 186, emphasis added). Shadowing these different activities inevitably involved both human and nonhuman actors since the project was constituted through associations of both types of actors. Materials collected during the data collection phase of the project included
video-recordings of meetings, phone calls, and events, as well as collecting documents such as e-mails and design materials. Meunier and Vásquez (2008) note that their method of following the actors, which consisted in shadowing both humans and nonhumans, enabled them to trace the multiplicity of actors contributing to the project, whether these actors be physical objects, people, or texts.

Participant observation has traditionally been defined as “being in the presence of others on an ongoing basis” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010, p. 135). However, drawing from the practices outlined by Bruni (2005) and Meunier and Vásquez (2008), I redefine participant observation in this study as following the actors by shadowing human and nonhuman action in the context of NCWIT’s “Sit With Me” campaign. Shadowing NCWIT’s “Sit With Me” campaign entails examining when the campaign was first discussed, how the campaign took the form that it did, how the campaign was brought to life, how the campaign developed through multiple interactions in a wide variety of settings, and how the campaign’s discourses of difference and occupation have transformed as they have been (re)appropriated by multiple actors across time and space. As is evident in the above description, following the actors is “extremely demanding” (Czarniawska, 2007, p. 18) and requires the researcher to conduct fieldwork in the multiple sites where the campaign is running its course. Because the course of the campaign cannot be predetermined, I didn’t have a clear idea of where the campaign would take
me when I first negotiated access to the field and began shadowing the “Sit With Me” campaign. In the next sections of this chapter, I elaborate on how I went about collecting the data for my study in the multiple sites where I followed the campaign.

**Data Collection Procedures**

**Access**

I first learned of NCWIT during my first semester as a doctoral student at the University of Colorado Boulder in 2009. Because of my research interests in occupational (de)segregation, I became more and more interested in conducting research at NCWIT because of its unique character of being an organization whose very mission is to desegregate a male-dominated occupation. I learned in the summer of 2010 that NCWIT was preparing to develop and launch a campaign designed to grab the attention of the public and to raise awareness about the importance of advancing women in “computing and I.T.” work, which a staff member at NCWIT told me about because she thought that it would be an excellent case from which to theorize occupational (de)segregation.

After discussions with both my research advisor and an NCWIT staff member, I contacted representatives from NCWIT to inform them of my project, request access to the organization, and negotiate my role at the NCWIT events that I would attend. NCWIT’s CEO, Lucinda Sanders, granted me full access to the organization in a formal letter of agreement.
that is included in Appendix B of this dissertation. In this letter, Sanders
gave me full permission to attend NCWIT’s meetings and events, as well as
to speak with NCWIT’s staff members and other people in NCWIT’s
organizational network about their role in NCWIT and its mission to advance
women in “computing and I.T.” work. Sanders also noted that at these
meetings, I may be provided with documents that I may use in my project,
unless a formal request is made for the document to be kept confidential.
Lastly, Sanders granted her permission for me to identify NCWIT by its real
name, rather than by an organizational pseudonym, provided that it is not
possible to trace comments back to individual people who participated in the
study.

One challenge of shadowing NCWIT’s practices is that it has a large
inter-organizational network. As such, there are individuals present who are
not NCWIT staff members at almost all NCWIT events and meetings. This
poses a difficulty because, while NCWIT staff members were all aware of my
role as a researcher at particular events, it was harder to ensure that
representatives from NCWIT’s organizational network were also aware of my
role as a researcher, especially at the large annual summits that I attended.
In negotiating access to NCWIT, Sanders agreed to take reasonable measures
to inform representatives from NCWIT’s organizational network who will be
present at the meetings and events that I attended of my status as a
researcher. I also presented myself non-equivocally as a researcher to all
individuals with whom I spoke at these events to ensure that they understood that I was there conducting research. All participants that I formally interviewed were also required to sign an informed consent form and were thus clear of my status as a researcher who will only report back to NCWIT through aggregate data that does not identify individual people. These procedures have been agreed upon not only by NCWIT, but also by the University of Colorado Boulder’s Institutional Review Board (IRB).

I began conducting field observations on a periodic basis in September 2010, as I was negotiating access to NCWIT. The University of Colorado Boulder’s IRB formally approved my project on February 11th, 2011. My fieldwork continued until August 2012, which was a natural point to leave the field because nothing new was happening with “Sit With Me” at the time. The campaign had largely been diffused in NCWIT’s organizational network and NCWIT was awaiting funding decisions to engage in any new action, such as publically launching the campaign at a national level.

My project, which is based upon the principles of shadowing and following actors discussed earlier, collected data through three distinct sources: participant observation, interviews, and texts. I will now elaborate on these specific techniques and how each contributed to generating the data in which my knowledge claims are grounded in this study.
Participant Observation

Occupational (re)branding campaigns do not develop and die out over a short period of time. In the case of “Sit With Me,” the project first began to develop early in 2010 and, three years later, the campaign is far from over. New stories and pictures continue to be uploaded to the “Sit With Me” website and the red chair is continuing to be taken to both NCWIT events and events that are put on by NCWIT affiliated organizations. Because my method of participant observation entails following the actors, as I discussed above, I shadowed “Sit With Me” over a two year period from September 2010 until August 2012.

I attended my first NCWIT meeting in September 2010. At this meeting, two representatives from a social marketing firm discussed the different forms that the campaign could possibly take. NCWIT was presented with three different campaign ideas from the social marketing firm: “I am not a woman, I am a technologist”; “Re-Frame It”; and “Sit With Me”. As I discuss in much greater detail in Chapter 5, “Sit With Me” was chosen as the campaign’s model from the three options that had been presented to NCWIT by the marketing firm. Attending this meeting thus gave a unique opportunity to shadow a campaign from the very moment that it came into existence and understand why this campaign idea was chosen over others.
Following the first meeting that I attended, I participated in all of the meetings (mostly conference calls) through which the campaign developed. I also received all e-mails among campaign team members about the development of “Sit With Me.” The campaign was first presented to NCWIT member organizations at its May 2011 summit at New York University, which I attended. The summit was a particularly important turning point for the campaign, as it was here that NCWIT member representatives could get their pictures taken in the red chair, the emblem of the campaign, for the first time. After this event, further meetings were held and further e-mail conversations arose about the logistics of “Sit With Me” and the form that the campaign should take. “Sit With Me” was also an important topic of conversation at the Pacesetters meeting in October 2011 at the University of Colorado Boulder, which I also attended. At this event, representatives from Pacesetters organizations were videotaped as they sat in the red chair and were asked to discuss progress that their organizations have made in the way of women’s advancement in “computing and I.T.” work. In January 2012, the “Sit With Me” website was launched, which enabled more people to participate directly in the campaign by uploading photos of them sitting in the red chair and stories about why they support women in “computing and I.T.”. Throughout the spring of 2012, I participated in the campaign team’s weekly conference calls in which important decisions about the campaign’s logistics and future were made. I also attended NCWIT’s 2012 summit in
Chicago in May 2012, where the “Sit With Me” campaign had an important presence and an update on the campaign’s trajectory was the subject of a plenary session. In the months that followed the summit, there were few developments with the “Sit With Me” campaign, as NCWIT was awaiting funding decisions that would greatly influence the future directions that the campaign would take. I thus stopped attending weekly NCWIT staff meetings in August 2012, the official point at which I left the field and began to focus on data analysis rather than on data collection.

As is evident in the above summary of my participation in the “Sit With Me” campaign, I actively followed it – or shadowed it – in many of the multiple sites where it acquired meaning. In all NCWIT events in which I participated, I kept detailed fieldnotes of my experiences. Fieldnotes constitute the researcher’s record of what occurred in the different events in which she or he participated and are among the most important sources of data in all ethnographic research (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). My fieldnotes document both what happened at all events that I have attended and my initial interpretations of the data. In order to create detailed, reliable fieldnotes, I regularly made rough jottings in either a legal pad or in a word processing program while I was attending events. I subsequently transformed these jottings into fieldnotes after the event ended. In line with traditional ethnographic standards, I made all efforts to ensure that my fieldnotes were written within twenty-four hours of attending event, although
it took up to a week to write detailed fieldnotes after attending NCWIT’s 2011 and 2012 summits where I conducted more than 12 hours of fieldwork per day for three to four consecutive days.

Although most of the NCWIT events in which I acted as a participant observer involve real time contact, such as conference calls, meetings, and summits, I also acted as a participant observer in many e-mail conversations about the “Sit With Me” campaign. In these e-mails, both NCWIT staff members and individuals from NCWIT’s organizational network discussed the campaign and the official campaign texts that were produced and made publicly available on the campaign’s website. As such, I have also been a participant observer in electronic spaces where interactions are not taking place in real time. In these cases, I copied some key e-mails into my fieldnotes, as these e-mails are the best record of these e-mail conversations. I have also compiled all attachments to these e-mails, as these attachments contain important data that is crucial to understanding how the campaign takes shape and to making sense of the content of the e-mails.

Another important electronic venue where I engaged in participant observation was the “Sit With Me” website. This website presents the official campaign texts that were developed by the campaign team (and approved by one of NCWIT’s social scientists), as well as enables users to become active participants in the campaign by requesting that a red chair be shipped to their organization (for free), posting stories on the website, posting pictures
and videos of people in the red chair to support technical women, buying a red chair, and buying what NCWIT has been calling “Sit With Me” swag such as t-shirts and luggage tags. The stories, pictures, and videos that have been posted onto the campaign’s public website have been crucial data for my project, as they have enabled me to compare the ways in which official campaign texts (produced by the campaign team) and vernacular discourse about the campaign (coming from NCWIT member representatives) construct difference in “computing and I.T.”.

In addition to the official campaign website, the campaign also has a presence on social media websites. For instance, there is a “Sit With Me” Facebook page that showcases a picture of the red chair, a link to the microsite, and various posts about technical women. There is also a “Sit With Me” Twitter feed which relays information about the campaign and the importance of women in “computing and I.T.”. Anyone with a Facebook account can like this page and anyone with a Twitter account can follow “Sit With Me” since November 2011. As of June 2013, 206 people have “liked” the “Sit With Me” Facebook page (compared with 61 people in March 2012) and 253 people are following “Sit With Me” on Twitter (compared with 32 people in March 2012). Given the substantial increase in Facebook and Twitter followers between March 2012 and June 2013, the “Sit With Me” campaign seems to be gaining increased resonance and notoriety.
By following the “Sit With Me” campaign in the multiple venues where it has been shaped and developed, I was able to collect rich data about the development of the campaign, the discourses surrounding it, and how these discourses have transformed and become fragmented as they have been (re)appropriated across time and space. However, participant observation data is not enough to fully understand the development of the campaign and the meanings that the campaign has acquired for the people who have participated in it. As I describe below, the knowledge claims that I generate from my study are also grounded in extensive interview data.

**Interviews**

Interviews are an integral part of ethnographic research. Although they have been cited as being overused in organizational communication scholarship (K. L. Ashcraft et al., 2009), they remain an important data collection procedure for my project. Lindlof and Taylor (2010) note the many purposes that interviews can serve: gathering information that cannot be effectively observed, inquiring about past events, corroborating data from other sources, and understanding the interpretations that participants make of the events where the researcher has been a participant observer. The interviews that I conducted had all such purposes: inquiring about the history of the “Sit With Me” campaign, seeking interpretations of the campaign that went unspoken in the events in which I participated, asking
people how people discuss the campaign with others, and interrogating why people have participated in the campaign in the first place.

For this study, I formally interviewed a total of 20 participants, nine of whom were NCWIT staff members and eleven of whom were NCWIT member representatives from various corporate and post-secondary organizations. In choosing interview participants, I relied heavily upon one documented sampling procedure: criterion sampling. Criterion sampling implicates that researchers select participants on the basis of an explicitly stated criterion (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). As Lindlof and Taylor (2010) note, most research studies rely upon some form of criterion sampling because researchers tend to recruit people based on experiences they have that are relevant to their research questions or because they possess certain types of knowledge. There is one major criterion that was a requirement for the people that I interviewed for this study: having been exposed to the “Sit With Me” campaign. Of course, this includes participants who were both NCWIT staff members and members of the official campaign team, as well as NCWIT member representatives who only became aware of “Sit With Me” through their attendance at NCWIT events such as the annual summits.

Interviewing members of the campaign team and NCWIT staff members was helpful because it enabled me to learn about critiques that many of these people had but that weren’t voiced in the events in which I was a participant observer. In this sense, conducting interviews with staff members and
campaign team members was a way of gathering data about the hidden transcripts of the campaign, which Murphy (1998) defines as interactions and beliefs that are kept out of the view of those who hold the most power. Interviews with NCWIT member representatives who weren’t a part of the campaign team were also sources of rich data, as they enabled me to see how member representatives talk about the campaign and its importance within their own networks, as well as to see how they both draw and deviate from the official texts that were produced by the campaign team.

I contacted potential participants to invite them to be interviewed for my study through informal chats and e-mails. All staff members that I asked agreed to participate in an interview, which likely stems from the close relationships that I had with many of them because of them seeing me at NCWIT staff meetings every week. Recruiting NCWIT member representatives was somewhat more difficult because they were less familiar with me and I had less regular contact with them than with NCWIT staff members. In addition to criterion sampling, I thus relied heavily on snowball sampling, which consists in locating an individual “who is willing to serve the dual role of an interview subject and a guide to potential new subjects” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010, p. 38). An NCWIT staff member used her expansive network to introduce me to member representatives whom she thought would be interested in being interviewed for my study. I also discussed my study
with member representatives whom I met at the various NCWIT events in which I participated and several express their interest in being interviewed.

Whereas all interviews with NCWIT staff members took place in person in NCWIT’s offices on the University of Colorado Boulder campus, the majority of member representatives were interviewed through Skype videoconferencing because of them living and working outside of the Denver metro area. Upon scheduling each interview, I provided each participant with an interview consent form, which was approved by the University of Colorado Boulder’s Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A of this dissertation) and which they were required to sign and return to me before we went ahead with the interview. The informed consent form explains their role as a participant, the purpose of the research study, and the ways in which I ensure that their data is kept confidential. As is standard in qualitative ethnographic research, I requested permission from all participants to digitally record interviews and all participants granted me that permission. I transcribed all interviews and relied heavily on these transcriptions while analyzing my data.

*Texts*

Although the term “text” tends to be associated only with written documents in common parlance, my use of the word “text” encompasses any relatively stable form of discourse that is the product of dynamic interactions and conversations between multiple participants (for more on this
perspective, see J. R. Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Over the course of my fieldwork, I collected a large number of important “Sit With Me” texts, both written and audiovisual: questionnaire responses, stories, videos, toolkits, fact sheets, campaign business cards, meeting notes and agendas, PowerPoint slides, and more.

As Lindlof and Taylor (2010) point out, texts are often some of the most important forms of data in qualitative research projects. This affirmation certainly held true in my ethnography of “Sit With Me” for a number of reasons. First, the official texts that were produced by the members of the “Sit With Me” campaign team are ultimately the result of extensive conversations among a wide variety of people. Whereas my participant observation practices enabled me to document sources of discursive struggles among various actors involved in the campaign, the campaign’s texts show how these struggles ultimately played out. Indeed, official texts endorse one particular view of reality and obscure other ways in which reality can be constructed. These official texts are also powerful carriers of discourses considering that they are most often publicly available and easily accessible online. For instance, all official “Sit With Me” texts are downloadable online to the general public on the campaign’s website. Because multiple texts were produced as the “Sit With Me” campaign developed, these texts are also important sources of data because they present a clear portrait of how official campaign discourses transformed over the course of the campaign.
Another of the reasons why official campaign texts were particularly important sources of data is that they serve to corroborate the fieldnotes that I produced from my participant observation practices. Because many discussions among the campaign team were also about the texts themselves, the texts enable me to better contextualize both those discussions and my fieldnotes. Perhaps most importantly though, these official texts complement the unofficial campaign discourse that I was able to collect through my interviews and participant observation. The official texts, which are available on the campaign’s website and widely distributed at NCWIT related events, thus enable me to compare vernacular, everyday discourse about the campaign with official discourse about the campaign that was sanctioned by the campaign team and NCWIT’s social scientists. Examining both official and vernacular discourse about “Sit With Me” is particularly important considering that it enables me to examine how the official campaign discourses are being (re)appropriated in everyday talk by various campaign participants. In sum, analyzing official and unofficial campaign discourse is crucial for understanding how the campaign can come to mean different things to different people and how various participants in the campaign struggle over its meaning.

In this section, I have described the process through which I collected data through this project. Shadowing the “Sit With Me” campaign took me multiple places, both physical and virtual. Through participant observation,
interviews, and the collection of official campaign texts, I was able to generate a huge amount of data from which I drew to provide answers to the two research questions that I articulated at the end of Chapter 4. But how did I make sense of this data to generate new knowledge about occupational (de)segregation that provides answers to my two research questions? In the next section of this chapter, I outline my data analysis procedures.

Data Analysis Procedures

Coding Procedures

One point that we can incontestably take away from my above discussion is that I collected an enormous amount of data during the two years that I spent shadowing the “Sit With Me” campaign. My 140 hours of participant observation at various NCWIT related events led to 455 pages of fieldnotes (with 1.5 spacing). I conducted 20 interviews that, combined, were 18 hours and 7 minutes long. I also collected hundreds of pages and several hours of videorecordings of official “Sit With Me” texts. Although I was able to collect such rich data, an important challenge for ethnographers is finding a way to organize it and make sense of it in some way (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Richards, 2005). I thus relied upon several strategies during the data analysis phase of my project in order to prevent myself from getting lost in the data and not being able to find any coherent meaning in it.
One of the key strategies that I used when analyzing the data that I collected was to organize it the qualitative software analysis program NVivo. Qualitative researchers have increasingly been using such software to help organize and code large data sets (Creswell, 2007). NVivo has been touted as a leader in the field of qualitative software (Butler-Kisber, 2010) and enabled me to group both my textual and audiovisual data so that I could code them using the same scheme. The purpose of coding is to “mark the units of text from fieldnotes, transcripts, documents, and audio-visual materials, which permit the researcher to sort, retrieve, link, and display data” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010, p. 248). Coding data in NVivo is particularly effective because it makes all data electronically searchable, thereby facilitating its retrieval.

Richards (2005) identifies three types of codes: descriptive, topical, and analytic. Descriptive coding refers to storing information about the data itself, such as when it was collected and who the participants were. Topical coding refers more to sorting the content of the data that was collected by subject. Lastly, analytical coding, which Richards (2005) claims is the most central to theory development in qualitative inquiry, is more conceptual and abstract, requiring researchers to go beyond what is simply said and relating it to existing literatures and theories.

In my analysis, I identified all three types of codes that Richards (2005) lists in the initial open coding phase of my analysis. Open coding refers to the initial, unrestricted coding of data where the researcher goes
through the data that is being analyzed and marks it on the basis of the data’s meaning (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). As can be expected, the process of free and open coding is not linear because analysts engage in several readings and re-readings of the data that they analyze. I thus analyzed the same data set multiple times, each time adding codes that I hadn’t identified in my previous readings of the data. Lindlof and Taylor (2010) note that coding the same data multiple times is important because a particular piece of data takes on different meanings as newer data is collected, since new data alters the scope and terms of the analysis. As a result, any given piece of data has multiple codes and is linked through these codes to several other pieces of data. All data that I linked to any individual code was automatically organized chronologically by NVivo, which enabled me to easily examine the evolution of campaign discourses pertaining to any particular code (e.g., defining “computing and I.T.” work, challenges related to the campaign, use of the category women) over the course of the campaign.

After engaging in multiple rounds of open coding, I began to look for overarching themes that traversed multiple codes. Put differently, I started the axial coding phase of my analysis, which involves creating categories through an ongoing process of comparing codes with each other and grouping similar codes together (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). Because categories are broader than codes, categories can be seen as bins in which similar codes can be grouped. The purpose of categories is thus to organize the codes that were
identified in the open coding process into distinct themes. In my NVivo coding scheme, I developed the following twenty-one categories out of the 429 codes that I created during the open coding phase of my data analysis:

In sum, the coding scheme that I developed was invaluable in that it enabled me to identify common themes in my data and to easily retrieve concrete pieces of empirical data on any of those themes. However, qualitative researchers need to do more than sort and organize the data that they collect; they must also thoroughly analyze the data to develop novel explanations to their research questions. As I discuss below, I relied heavily upon LeGreco and Tracy’s (2009) method of discourse tracing to develop those explanations.
Analysis Procedures

Because my research questions are fundamentally oriented towards the process of occupational rebranding and investigating how the discourses of difference and occupation surrounding the “Sit With Me” campaign emerge and evolve over the course of the campaign, I relied heavily upon the method of discourse tracing to answer my research questions. Discourse tracing involves examining how particular discourses, such discourses of difference and discourses of the “Sit With Me” campaign’s red chair, evolve through time and space (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009). Analysts engaging in discourse tracing examine the transformation of particular discourses at three distinct levels – the macro-level, the meso-level, and the micro-level – as well as note discrepancies and tensions across these three levels of discourse.

Macro discourse is generally defined by communication scholars as referring to “broader social narratives and systems of enduring thought” (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004, p. 7). Concretely, researchers tracing discourses of difference in a campaign such as “Sit With Me” would thus examine how broader societal narratives of difference inform constructions of difference within the “Sit With Me” campaign. Similarly, researchers tracing the discourse of an artifact such as the red chair in the “Sit With Me” campaign would examine broader social narratives about red chairs and what meanings they have outside of the campaign. Popular culture and media texts are also particularly useful ways of examining these larger societal narratives.
Meso-level discourse refers to attempts to coordinate practices across multiple sites, such as policy texts (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009). In an organizational setting, official policies, rules, and procedures are thus all examples of meso-level discourse. Unlike macro discourses that function at the societal level and micro discourses that function at the individual level, meso-level discourses tend to be contained to a specific group or organization. In the context of the “Sit With Me” campaign, all official texts such as the “Sit With Me” toolkit, the videos developed by the campaign team, and the campaign fact sheets are examples of meso-level discourse in that they represent how the campaign – not society and not an individual – constructs meanings about difference and about the red chair.

Micro-level discourse refers to “the local uses of text and language within a specific context” (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009, p. 1520). Thus, micro-discourses pertaining to the “Sit With Me” campaign refer to the ways in which anyone who comes into contact with the campaign talks about it in localized, situated contexts. In my analysis, I treat all talk and text about the “Sit With Me” campaign in situated interactions between two or more actors to be micro-level discourse. All of my interview data and much of my participant observation data thus represents micro-level discourse about notions such as difference, the red chair, and the “Sit With Me” campaign more generally.
Through my analysis chapters, I go back and forth between these three levels of discourse in order to show how the “Sit With Me” campaign constructs difference and occupational (de)segregation in the field of “computing and I.T.” over the course of the campaign. The method of discourse tracing ultimately enables me to develop thorough and insightful answers to my research questions that are fundamentally concerned with the processes through which the campaign came into being and the discourses surrounding the campaign evolved.

Because the data analysis procedures that I described above are fundamentally inductive, I did not come into this project with any particular idea of what the major theoretical and practical contributions of my project would be. As such, I did not know that I would be using the data that I was collecting to queer occupational (de)segregation research and practice. Of course, I had some vague ideas of what types of contributions that I thought the data may allow me to make, such as extending actor-network theory or theorizing occupational rebranding efforts through Spivak’s (1988, 2006) notion of strategic essentialism, but I did not start formal data analysis until after I had left the field. When I began my data analysis through the method of discourse tracing, I became increasingly aware of the essentialist official and unofficial discourse that surrounded the “Sit with Me” campaign. Moreover, given my increasing commitment to propose practical solutions to communication dilemmas and paradoxes through my research (e.g., Craig,
1999, 2006; Craig & Tracy, 1995), I wanted to do more than theorize this essentialist discourse; I wanted to develop an alternative way to engage in occupational rebranding that would eschew essentialist discourse and that would conceptualize difference beyond the taken for granted categories of “women” and “men”. After becoming more familiar with queer theory for another project whose aim was to queer the notion of researcher reflexivity (J. McDonald, 2013a), I began to analyze my data through a queer lens and to think about how a queer theorist would conceive of the notion of occupational (de)segregation. This is ultimately where my impulse to queering occupational (de)segregation stemmed from.

Whereas one may critique, based on the above description of my analysis procedures, that the queer critique that I offer in this dissertation is too heavily rooted in my theoretical commitments instead of in the actual empirical data that I collected, I reject (like a good queer theorist) the separation of “data” and “theoretical commitments” in that way. Indeed, I see my data and theoretical commitments as being mutually constitutive because it is the exclusive focus on the category “women” and the presence of essentialist discourse in the campaign that led me to developing the queer theoretical framework that I have outlined. Moreover, my pre-existing axiological commitments directed me to noticing the essentialist discourse and the exclusive use of the category “women” in my data. I thus contend
that my theoretical commitments and my data inform each other, as opposed to one being determined by the other.

So far in this chapter, I have extensively described the case from which I theorize occupational rebranding, the methods through which I collected data about this case, and the procedures that I followed to analyze this data and answer my research questions. But how do you – the reader – know whether or not the study that I have conducted is worthwhile? Through which criteria should you evaluate my study and how would you know if my study met those criteria or not? In the next section of this chapter, I provide answers to those questions by articulating the set of criteria that I believe should be used to evaluate this research project.

**Quality Criteria**

What does it mean to conduct a quality qualitative research study? Are there universal criteria for determining whether a qualitative study is successful? According to Tracy (2010), several criteria exist: demonstrating a worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, a significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence. Taylor and Trujillo’s (2001) set of general criteria for evaluating qualitative research, notably providing evidence of a committed study, using emic and inductive analysis, showing a continuous movement between explanations and data, showing rhetorical skill in language use, employing triangulation, and using data drawn from a
corpus that is publicly available for review, resonates well with many of Tracy’s (2010) criteria.

However, despite the criteria listed above, many researchers argue that quality criteria for qualitative research “vary with regard to the community under investigation, the dictates of the time, and the context within which the investigator operates” (Amis & Silk, 2008, p. 475). Thus, quality criteria depend on the nature of the study at hand and the metatheoretical commitments of the researcher. Given the interpretive nature of my study and the feminist axiology that underpins it, the following specific quality criteria are particularly relevant to my study: credibility, dependability, conformability, and a commitment to social justice.

*Credibility*, or what Butler-Kisber (2010) refers to as trustworthiness, has been proposed as an alternative criterion to validity. Whereas traditionally validity has been an important criterion of social science research, interpretive qualitative researchers increasingly argue that this term has no place in qualitative research because it implies a realist ontology incompatible with interpretive metatheoretical commitments. For instance, the term “validity” implies that only one truth exists and that it is the researcher’s job to uncover it, but the very nature of interpretive qualitative research is such that different researchers will arrive at different conclusions because researchers actively shape the field and are not simply “flies on the wall.”
The credibility of a given study is determined by the amount and quality of the data upon which researchers draw (Butler-Kisber, 2010). In this regard, my study can be considered to be very credible considering that I spent two full years in the field, effectively followed the “Sit With Me” campaign to multiple physical and virtual venues during that time, and collected multiple sources of data that both complement and corroborate each other: participant observation fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and official texts such as documents distributed at meetings, the “Sit With Me” toolkit, and data published on the “Sit With Me” website. The data that I have collected thus ensure that I am using the widely touted strategy of triangulation (Amis & Silk, 2008). Triangulation implies that researchers use of multiple sources of data in their study, which is important given that “multiple types of data, researcher viewpoints, theoretical frames, and methods of analysis allow different facets of problems to be explored, increases scope, deepens understanding, and encourages consistent (re)interpretation” (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). Butler-Kisber (2010) has also cited the use of multiple forms of data to corroborate explanations to social phenomena as a key way of achieving the interpretive goals of research credibility and trustworthiness. In sum, credibility and trustworthiness stem from prolonged engagement in the field, persistent inquiry that produces rich field texts, the convergence of field texts from different sources to triangulate data, and interpretation that is grounded in the field texts (Butler-Kisber,
2010) – all practices in which I have engaged to ensure the credibility and the trustworthiness of my study.

Dependability is another important criterion against which I believe my study should be evaluated. Dependability has to do with the transparency of the researcher in terms of the motives for conducting the study, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures (Butler-Kisber, 2010). In this dissertation, I have strived to meet the quality criterion of dependability by making the research process transparent and explaining how I conducted my research and analysis in significant detail. Although this entire dissertation chapter can be seen as the primary way through which I attempt to convey the dependability of my study, the personal tone and reflections that can be found in each of this dissertation chapter’s also ensures dependability by making my thought processes transparent to the reader.

Conformability, which entails providing a reflexive, self-critical account, can be evaluated by the quality of my reflections on the impact of my role as a researcher and my social identities on the research process. Reflexivity is now considered to be crucially important in most qualitative research communities, as it has become widely accepted that “knowledge claims are dependent on the person who makes them” (J. Sandberg, 2005, p. 46). The practice of reflexivity is even more important for researchers with feminist metatheoretical commitments, as feminist researchers “must always
reflect on the ways in which their research is influenced by their own social positioning, their gender, race, class, and so on” (Jaggar, 2008b, p. 38). In order to meet the criterion of conformability, I offer in-depth reflections on my role as a researcher in the next and final section of this chapter. In addition, I offer personal reflections about my roles as a participant, researcher, and analyst throughout both of my subsequent analysis chapters in order to show how my personal experiences and identities have influenced the fieldwork process and, by extension, the knowledge claims that I make. This strategy is consistent with critical and feminist approaches to research which argue that these personal experiences and identities can never be evacuated from the research process (Alvesson & Ashcraft, 2009; Calás & Smircich, 2009; Carrington, 2008; Rodriguez, 2010; Weiner-Levy, 2009); therefore, research studies are more credible when researchers engage in thoughtful, personal accounts of how those experiences and identities have made a difference in the study.

Lastly, given my position as a researcher with feminist axiological commitments, my demonstration of a commitment to social justice is an important quality criterion for my study (Jaggar, 2008a). To this end, I am quite clear: although making theoretical contributions to organizational communication research on work and occupations is a central driving force of this study, an equally important goal for me is to develop knowledge that will help practitioners seeking to desegregate occupations engage effectively in
this important endeavor. A major element of this research project is therefore to expose new ways of thinking that, when implemented, can make current approaches to occupational (de)segregation and research even more socially just by considering how rectifying the problem of occupational desegregation requires more than getting more underrepresented groups of bodies into a particular field – it entails examining how occupational segregation can be sustained and/or curbed through everyday embodied and discursive performances of identity that create hostile and/or inclusive occupational cultures. Because I have made a commitment to sharing my findings with NCWIT, I will have the opportunity to discuss these new ways of thinking about occupational (de)segregation with various NCWIT staff members, which may potentially lead to future collaboration on concrete occupational rebranding campaigns that consider segregation as related to both bodily features and discursive performances.

As I stated above, conformability is an important criteria of qualitative research that is met through the researcher being transparent about how she or he influenced the research project and the assumptions that she or he brought into the field. In the final section of this chapter, I elaborate more on my positionality as a researcher in order to shed light on how my identities and experiences have shaped several aspects of this research project.
Researcher Reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity, a practice that involves researchers considering the implications of their positionality on the knowledge claims that they generate, has increasingly become a canonical term in qualitative research (Cassell, Bishop, Symon, Johnson, & Buehring, 2009). Generally speaking, the aim of reflexivity is to situate researchers in the context where they are conducting research so that readers can better grasp what led them to making some methodological and analytical choices over others. Qualitative researchers have noted three important ways in which researchers can engage in reflexivity to increase the credibility and transparency of their knowledge claims: (1) explaining their metatheoretical assumptions (Cunliffe, 2002, 2003), (2) explaining the strengths and limitations of their methodological choices (Jaggar, 2008a), and (3) examining their social location and how it compares with the social location of their participants (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Here, the concept of social location is generally operationalized as referring to “the complex interactions between our gender, race/ethnicity, age, ability, sexuality and socio-economic class” (Scott-Dixon, 2004, p. 32). An important component of social location is also one’s access to a given body of knowledge. All of these elements impact the knowledge claims that researchers and practitioners make. Below, I offer reflexive accounts of my role of a researcher on three levels: my metatheoretical commitments, my methodological choices, and my social location.
**Metatheoretical Assumptions**

In regards to my metatheoretical assumptions, I recognize that as an interpretive researcher with critical and feminist commitments, my presence at the different events that I attended during my fieldwork contributed to shaping the campaign in many ways. Indeed, from the very beginning of my fieldwork, NCWIT staff members made it clear that they would like me to not only observe their meetings and communicative practices, but also participate in them and share ideas. As such, I not only collected data; I shaped the very data that I collected.

A central premise of both critical and feminist methodologies is that interests and values can never be separated from the research process (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Calás & Smircich, 2009; Cunliffe & Jun, 2005; Jaggar, 2008a; Thomas, 1993). As a result, the question becomes not if values influence the research process and how they can be compartmentalized, but which values are driving the research process. As discussed previously, a strong commitment to social justice has driven my study from the very beginning. I view occupational segregation (not just in “computing and I.T.” work and in all fields with high levels of segregation) as a case of social injustice because it leads to some individuals experiencing difficulties and being tokenized in their line of work only on the basis of one or more socially significant differences that they embody and/or perform.
Consequently, I believe that all efforts to desegregate occupations, including NCWIT’s “Sit With Me” campaign and other work, are important and laudable.

Nevertheless, my axiological position has changed somewhat over the course of my project. When I first began conceptualizing this research project and conducting my fieldwork, I accepted NCWIT’s overall mission somewhat uncritically. For instance, I wrote in my prospectus that “my research study inevitably advocates social change by openly espousing NCWIT’s mission to increase women’s advancement in computing and IT work” (J. McDonald, 2012, p. 59). As such, it was increasingly difficult for me to be critical of NCWIT’s practices, which hindered my ability to pose important analytical questions (J. McDonald, forthcoming). However, as my project evolved, I became more critical of NCWIT’s mission. While my commitment to social justice remains constant, the way in which I conceptualize social justice as changed. As discussed in Chapter 2, a liberal feminist perspective on the “Sit With Me” campaign sees social justice as being achieved when more women enter the field. However, as the project went on, I increasingly began to conceptualize social justice through my queer metatheoretical commitments, therefore seeing social justice in the context of the “Sit With Me” campaign as being about de-naturalizing the very notions of gender and difference in “computing and I.T.”. Consequently, whereas NCWIT’s mission frames the problem of occupational segregation in “computing and I.T.” as a lack of
female bodies, I see it as crucial to question what we even mean by “female” bodies so that we can advocate dissociating any type of body from “computing and I.T.” work, as well as see people who work in the field as each embodying and performing a unique configuration of difference. Consequently, I contend that efforts to desegregate occupations must be primarily concerned with deconstructing taken for granted constructions (e.g., “female bodies”) so that we can boldly contest that an individual’s bodily features has nothing to do with her or his capacity to develop technology. Moreover, and as I argue in greater detail throughout this dissertation, an important advantage of framing the occupational desegregation efforts in these terms is that it fosters advocacy for more people who fall out of normative occupational discourses, regardless of how they identify or are categorized.

Although I have made the case that categorical thinking is problematic in occupational (de)segregation research and that these categories should instead be de-naturalized and emptied of any intrinsic meaning, I have recourse to categories such as “women” throughout this dissertation, including in the analysis of my data. The use of these categories is a source of tension for me, but I believe a necessarily evil in order to expose the very limits of categorical thinking and the novelty of the queer approach that I develop and advocate. Because the “Sit With Me” campaign is heavily premised in categorical thinking and categories such as “women” and “men” are continually reified in both the campaign’s discourse and in the vocabulary
of my participants, I seek, through my analysis, to show how in clinging to these categories, important differences and similarities among “women” and “men” people are unable to be adequately addressed, leading to what I argue is a paradox of inclusivity. This leads me to claim that much of the political potential of the campaign to de-naturalize difference in “computing and I.T.” is lost, which, from a queer reading, should be the goal of occupational desegregation efforts. Consequently, I proceed to reconstruct the campaign from a queer perspective in order to show what can be gained from a queer approach to occupational (de)segregation that precludes categorical thinking.

Another point of tension in my queer framework is my strong commitment to do research that makes a difference and that can be useful to practitioners beyond the academy (e.g., Craig, 1999, 2006; Craig & Tracy, 1995; Frey & Carragee, 2007; Timmerman, 2009a; Timmerman, 2009b). Indeed, queer theory has rightfully been criticized for often being too abstract and not offering any practical solutions to real-world problems, such as the current extent of occupational segregation in labor markets around the world. One of the reasons for this is surely because, as Parker (2002) wittily states, “it is hard to imagine someone without a reasonable grounding in (at least) the three F’s (Foucault, feminism, and Freud) being able to make much of what Butler and Sedgwick write” (p. 156). This does not mean, however, that queer theory offers us nothing more than intellectual discussion for the sake of academic debate. Indeed, one common theme in my current research
agenda is showing how queer theory enables us to rethink problems in new, useful ways that can contribute to practice. Such is the explicit aim of one of my recent articles, which demonstrates how engaging in what I call “queer reflexivity” fosters better management learning (J. McDonald, 2013a).

In the spirit of the applied queer approach that is at the heart of my current research agenda and that drives this dissertation, I contend that queer theory provides a useful framework through which to rethink occupational (de)segregation research and practice. As such, my aim is for the ideas that I put forth in this dissertation and that are guided by my queer premises to have resonance with both scholars and practitioners. Such is also the aim, however, of other approaches to occupational (de)segregation research and practice, such as the business case for diversity that I summarized and critiqued in Chapter 1. How, then, is my queer approach different from the business case for diversity?

For one, the two cases’ impulses for desegregation are very different. Whereas the business case for desegregation advances that practitioners should seek to desegregate occupations for pragmatic reasons (e.g., it will increase company profits), the queer case for desegregation is unapologetically political. Moreover, the premises of the business case for diversity are fundamentally conservative when compared to the premises of the queer approach to desegregation that I develop and advocate in this dissertation. The business case for diversity postulates that we should work
towards desegregation because businesses will benefit from it, thereby reifying the existing social order in which the ideologies of managerialism and capitalism dominate and in which identity categories are taken for granted rather than deconstructed. As such, the business case would argue that we need more women in “computing and I.T.” because women will create different technology than men. The queer case for desegregation, however, would reject any broad claims about what a group of people, like “women”, may or may not bring to the table when they design technology. Instead, it is fundamentally concerned with destabilizing the existing social order in order to dissociate difference from work, as well as deconstructing categories of difference. Consequently, the queer approach to desegregation has as its primary aims to (1) shatter the idea that embodying and/or performing difference in particular ways somehow makes people more or less suited to exercising a particular occupation, and (2) show that anybody, regardless of difference, can have the qualities that will enable them to succeed in a particular line of work. Clearly, businesses may still benefit from the queer approach, as dissociating work from difference in all of its forms can open up opportunities for people to explore careers that they may not have considered otherwise, thereby expanding the pool of qualified workers in a given field. However, the queer approach is more radical in that it calls into question the ways in which all work is organized around difference and pushes us to call
into question categories of difference that are commonly taken for granted in organizational life.

So far, my reflexive account has been primarily concerned with explaining how my metatheoretical commitments have shaped this dissertation and the knowledge claims that I make. However, as I outline below, my methodological choices also warrant researcher reflexivity, especially considering that ethnographic projects that adopt a queer framework are quite rare.

Methodological Choices

Although having recourse to the categories of “humanities” and “social sciences” does go somewhat against the spirit of queer theory, it is clear that queer theory has originated in disciplines that are more humanistic than social scientific. Sedgwick, for instance, was a literary critic and a distinguished professor of English prior to her decease. Moreover, Butler is a professor of rhetoric and comparative literature and is widely regarded as a continental philosopher. Because the roots of queer theory are humanistic, translating queer theory into applied, empirical, social science research is never a linear or straightforward exercise.

In the social scientific disciplines of organizational communication and organization studies, research drawing from queer theory has generally consisted in reading cultural texts about organizational life through a queer lens (e.g., Bowring, 2004; Tyler & Cohen, 2008). More recently, however,
scholars have begun to interrogate existing organizational theories through queer thoughts and assumptions. For instance, a recent article published in one of the field’s top journals deconstructs existing leadership theories in order to expose the heterosexual and homoerotic desire that they mask (Harding et al., 2011). Following these authors, my aim in this project is to expose tensions and paradoxes in the current ways in which scholars and practitioners talk about occupational desegregation and subsequently propose a queer approach as a viable alternative that enables us to effectively manage these tensions and paradoxes. To do so, I first conduct an analysis of the “Sit With Me” campaign’s discourse that is intersectional at its core. Subsequently, I deconstruct my intersectional analysis through a queer lens in order to expose its limitations and propose an alternative queer approach to occupational desegregation.

The above paragraph begs the question: to what extent is this dissertation queer? In response, I would say that this dissertation is queer to the extent that I illustrate how incorporating queer thought into occupational (de)segregation research and practice enables us to think more productively about how we can best go about studying the phenomenon of occupational segregation and making interventions to effectively desegregate occupations. The stance on difference that I advocate throughout this dissertation is thus rooted in the queer metatheoretical assumptions that I outlined earlier in this chapter. As such, I am particularly critical of any attempts to make
broad political claims through the use of identity categories, as well as of
discourse that seems to paint the world into neat categories.

This dissertation is also queer to the extent that the knowledge claims
that I generate are incontestably political, as in addition to exposing how
current ways of talking about difference in “computing and I.T.” normalize
certain forms of difference and identities over others, I advocate alternative
ways of talking about difference that undermine commonly taken for granted
assumptions. Indeed, to claim that we cannot take the category “women” for
granted, as I do, certainly challenges everyday ways of understanding
gender. However, these seemingly “radical” claims are also in the spirit of
queer theory, which at its core is concerned with de-stabilizing concepts (e.g.,
gender, sexuality) that are so taken for granted that they appear as naturally
existing even as they are political constructions that are (re)enacted through
everyday embodied and discursive performances of identity.

As is evident in this discussion to date, my queer metatheoretical
assumptions, as well as my methodological choices, unquestionably impact
the knowledge claims that I generate from my analysis. The purpose of
reflexivity is, of course, to make these assumptions and choices transparent
and to discuss how researchers manage tensions that arise between them.
However, no reflexive account of fieldwork is complete without addressing
how difference – defined broadly and which is often (in)visible – mediates the
entire research process. As such, I now address how, to use an expression coined by Allen (2004, 2011), difference has mattered in this project.

_Difference Matters_

Following many researchers who have reflected on how the differences that they embody and perform have mattered in their field research (e.g., Aldridge, 1995; Carrington, 2008; Jacob, 2006; Kennedy & Davis, 1996; Sherman, 2002; Twine, 2000; Wagle & Cantaffa, 2008; Walby, 2010; Watson & Scranton, 2001; Weiner-Levy, 2009), I recognize that my social location (as a white gay-identified man) no doubt plays an important role in the axiological positions that I hold. However, I do not believe that it is enough for me to simply state that I was the only man at almost all NCWIT staff meetings that I attended and a token male at many other events, even though this is the dominant way in which researchers have engaged in reflexivity to date (Carrington, 2008). Instead of reifying identity categories such as “men” and “white” and assuming that those categories somehow speak for themselves, I argue that categories must be deconstructed in reflexive accounts because not all “men” or “white” people will impact the research process in the same way. This is the basic premise of the queer reflexivity approach that I have developed and illustrated elsewhere and that holds that “researchers must avoid making broad assumptions on the basis of their avowed and ascribed social identities, as well as those of their participants” (J. McDonald, 2013a, p. 140).
Because I do not consider myself to be an alpha male or to either embody or discursively perform many of the stereotypical characteristics that are associated with white men, conducting fieldwork in a female-dominated organization did not seem unnatural to me. After all, I had been in many female-dominated environments before, starting even when I was in fifth grade and I was the only boy on my elementary school’s skipping (jump rope) team. It is impossible for me to know whether or not my presence as a male at NCWIT events and staff meetings raised suspicions or made others uncomfortable because there were very few instances in which I was explicitly called out for being a male in this female-dominated milieu. However, I would like to share one moment where I felt important tensions between my role as a researcher and my identity as a man. Below, I provide the transcript of this interaction that took place during an interview with an NCWIT member representative who was essentializing female and male identities in important ways:

Participant: So I think women will ensure that their product is perfect because they expect nothing less for themselves. And they care about it. Women definitely care about the product that they are putting out there. That’s not to say that men don’t care... oh, God Jamie, sorry. (laughing) (pause) You men!!

(both laughing)

Jamie: In terms of men not feeling emotions and that type of thing? I don’t know because I mean, I don’t think I’m a typical man if you can say that. (laughing by my participant) I think I am very emotional at times. But I think that what’s interesting is that we are taught to not show our emotions.
The above interview interaction stood out at me as one of the moments during my fieldwork where I found that my identity as a man mattered the most. My participant had been presenting men in a negative light and making essentialist comments about men when she realized, in mid-sentence, that I am a man. Afterwards, she seemed embarrassed and apologized. We both laughed at this interactional episode and I went on to truthfully say that the comments she was making about men don’t apply to me and the way in which I perform my identities. Perhaps she had already realized though, before the interview even began, that I am not a “typical man.” The fact that she all of a sudden remembered that I am a man in mid-sentence implies that my identity as a man was not explicitly thought about by her at some moments during the interview. However, had she been speaking to another man with a deeper voice and a more traditional masculine communication style, she may have thought about his identity as a man over the course of the interview, which may have shaped the interaction differently. In this sense, even though I was a man conducting fieldwork in a female-dominated milieu and about women in “computing and I.T.,” I was a particular man who influenced the research process in ways that are different from the ways in which another man may have influenced the research process (Sedgwick, 2008).

So far, I’ve reflected on how certain of the differences that I embody and perform have shaped the course of this research project, relationships
with my participants, and ultimately the knowledge claims that I make. I’ve talked, for instance, about gender, race, and sexuality. However, there is another form of difference that is crucial to understanding my positionality as an ethnographer at NCWIT events and that I am indebted to Michele Jackson for bringing to my attention: my knowledge of “computing and I.T.” work. Whereas some computer scientists engage in research on difference in “computing and I.T.” themselves (e.g., Ensmenger, 2001, 2010a, 2010b), most research on difference in this occupation has been conducted by researchers in other disciplines: sociology, management, and communication just to name a few. In this regard, I am no exception: I am a communication scholar who does not know how to code and who has only taken one computer programming course in my life – and that was all the way back when I was in high school and Windows 95 and AOL were considered to be “in”. As a result, I could potentially be open to critiques that I am just another scholar who is up in the ivory tower and who is making political claims about difference in “computing and I.T.” without understanding what the work entails and the ins and outs of programming. Indeed, I faced one such criticism as I was defending this dissertation to my committee. I was told that because of my lack of knowledge about the work of “computing and I.T.”, I’m not able to recognize the challenges of creating an idealized, inclusive workplace in “computing and I.T.”, which has at its foundation characteristics that are conductive to a stereotypically masculine workplace.
However, I take issue with the claim that “computing and I.T.” has at its foundation work that is more conductive to a stereotypically masculine workplace. For instance, Kelan (2008), who has conducted several empirical studies of technical workplaces, has found that “while the popular perception of ICT workers is of rather asocial and solitary hackers, the ideal ICT worker is increasingly described in popular and academic literature as having both technical and emotional competencies” (p. 50). Considering that technical competencies are commonly associated with men and masculinity and that emotional competencies are commonly associated with women and femininity, Kelan’s (2008) findings imply that “computing and I.T.” workers require qualities that are both stereotypically masculine and stereotypically feminine to do their jobs. Consequently, the occupation of “computing and I.T.” cannot be seen as having only stereotypically masculine characteristics at its foundation, just like nursing cannot be seen as requiring only the stereotypically feminine qualities of caring and compassion. Indeed, in a study that I published elsewhere (J. McDonald, 2013b), I found that female and male nursing students described the occupation of nursing in not only remarkably similar ways, but in ways that emphasize the need for nurses to possess both technical and emotional – and thus stereotypically masculine and stereotypically feminine – competencies. Furthermore, because both women and men can, and often do, possess both the stereotypical masculine and feminine qualities that make a good nurse or a good technologist, there is
nothing inherent about the work of either nursing or “computing and I.T.” that make it more or less suited to either women or men (Ensmenger, 2010b; Kelan, 2008; J. McDonald, 2013b).

Further support for the claim that the material aspects of “computing and I.T.” work make it conducive to a stereotypically masculine workplace can be found in the research literature that examines the history of this occupation. In this regard, the research is clear: “computing and I.T.” has not always been a stereotypically masculine field. Indeed, the use of computers and the practice of programming were initially seen as tasks for which women were exceptionally well suited. One only needs to open a 1967 issue of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, pictured below, to see how much the work of “computing and I.T.” was seen as stereotypically feminine work:

As seen as in the above image (and as previously discussed in Chapter 1), computing was seen as being very compatible with gender norms for
women in 1967. Dr. Grace Hopper, who is well known as a pioneer in the field of computer science, stated that programming is “just like planning a dinner”. She continues: “Programming requires patience and the ability to handle detail. Women are ‘naturals’ at computer programming” (Ensmenger, 2010b, p. 115). Of course, we know that the story today is very different. The work of “computing and I.T.” is seen as being exceptionally well suited to men, so much so that according to at least two of my female research participants who work in the field, it isn’t uncommon for female programmers to hear statements such as “you code well for a girl”. Thus, the gender identity of “computing and I.T.” has undergone a major identity shift since 1967, as this work has went from being culturally coded as stereotypically feminine to culturally coded as stereotypically masculine work. Similar patterns have been found in other occupations, including aviation, accounting, hospital administration, and medicine (e.g., Arndt & Bigelow, 2005; K. L. Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004b; Kirkham & Loft, 1993; Witz, 1992). This research clearly shows that the gender identities of work are constantly up for grabs and evolving through complex, dynamic, and political communication processes. Consequently, I argue that the material features of “computing and I.T.” do not prevent this occupation from being inclusive of individuals who embody and perform multiple forms of difference.

In addition, I reject that one must know how to code in order to study difference in “computing and I.T.” and make intervention proposals on how to
make workplaces more inclusive. Drawing from the notion of queer reflexivity that I discussed earlier, I postulate that because social identities are so complex and fragmented, a researcher does not necessarily need to share any particular characteristic with her or his participants (such as being a “coder” or “programmer”) in order to research their social worlds and make political claims about them (J. McDonald, 2013a). In fact, if this were the case, much of NCWIT’s Social Science Advisory Board would fall apart, as many of these experts who make intervention proposals to NCWIT do not have a background in “computing and I.T.” or know how to code. Individual “computing and I.T.” workers certainly have insights about the field that many researchers do not, but many of these researchers (including myself) also have access to a wealth of knowledge and resources that provide them with different insights. As such, whereas I do not and cannot claim expertise in the actual work that “computing and I.T.” practitioners do, I believe that my expertise in other areas (including the social science research on difference in organizational and occupational life) qualifies me to analyze and point out discursive tensions in NCWIT’s “Sit With Me” campaign and make proposals about how those tensions may be managed and even averted.

On these reflexive notes, this chapter comes to an end. In sum, this chapter has provided a detailed overview of the “Sit With Me” campaign, the multi-sited ethnographic methods that I used to collect data on the campaign, the ways in which I went about analyzing the large data set that I collected,
the evaluation criteria that I kept in mind as I was conducting my study, and how my researcher positionality shaped the research process and the knowledge claims that I generate throughout the rest of this manuscript. Now that I have situated my research problematics in the existing literature and explained the methods through which I explored those problematics, I turn to my first analysis chapter, which is concerned with the discursive processes through which the “Sit With Me” campaign sought to rebrand the field of “computing and I.T.” work.
CHAPTER V

THE PROCESS OF REBRANDING “COMPUTING AND I.T.” WORK IN THE “SIT WITH ME” CAMPAIGN

Occupational identities are dynamic, contested, and evolving (K. L. Ashcraft, 2006a, 2007, 2013). Perhaps there is no better illustration of this than the 1967 *Cosmopolitan* article that I discussed in the previous chapter. Although women were seen as computing “naturals” at the time, white, male adolescent “nerds” fundamentally changed the image and public perception of this occupation less than two decades later (Ensmenger, 2010b). Today, the occupational identity of “computing and I.T.” continues to evolve and is, like it has always been, up for grabs. NCWIT’s “Sit With Me” campaign is attempting to showcase this field as one that is inclusive of women and thus rebrand it for gender diversity. But how does NCWIT’s “Sit With Me” campaign rebrand “computing and I.T.” work for gender diversity? And what discursive struggles are involved in this rebranding process? These are the questions that I explore in this first findings chapter.

As discussed previously, NCWIT's attempts to render the occupational identity of “computing and I.T.” inclusive of women can be understood through the concept of occupational rebranding. This concept refers to the strategic discursive practices through which a group of actors strives to shape collective notions of occupational identity in particular ways – including, and especially, along the lines of gender and race (K. L. Ashcraft et al., 2012).
However, because communication is a complex, multi-sited constitutive process (K. L. Ashcraft et al., 2009; Craig, 1999), the collective meaning of occupational identities cannot be ‘fixed’; rather, these identities are always subject to change in the different contexts in which they are invoked. As such, examining the process by which the “Sit With Me” campaign contributed to rebranding “computing and I.T.” work for gender diversity requires more than an analysis of the static campaign texts that were produced, such as official campaign videos and fact sheets about the campaign. Indeed, the meanings of the campaign’s messages are constructed not only through official texts, but also through the dynamic interactions and exchanges that led to the construction of these texts, through the interactions and exchanges emanating from these texts, and through larger societal discourses. Consequently, I “trace” occupational identity constructions across multiple levels of discourse and through time and space, as I outlined in Chapter 4 (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009). Through my analysis, I show how occupational identity constructions have formed and transformed through the campaign, as well as highlight the political process through which the meanings of the campaign are contested among various actors.

In this analysis chapter, I trace the trajectory of the “Sit With Me” campaign by attending to issues that arose from its birth in September 2010 through its plans for a public launch in August 2012. This chapter thus takes us on a journey that highlights the birth of the “Sit With Me” campaign, the
discursive struggles over different meanings that the campaign has acquired, and the different actors that have shaped those meanings. There are four key moments that I highlight in our journey. First, I illustrate the political process through which the “Sit With Me” campaign was chosen over other potential campaign ideas, how this decision was tied to discourses of gender and race, and how a red chair became a powerful actor in the campaign, as well as its central organizing element. Afterwards, I highlight three discursive moves that illustrate struggle, contestation, and fragmentation over the meaning of the campaign’s red chair: (1) the campaign team collecting vernacular discourse from NCWIT member representatives that associates particular meanings with the red chair, (2) the campaign team creating official campaign texts through editing out some of the meanings that NCWIT member representatives associated with the chair and that were deemed problematic by some members of the campaign team, and (3) NCWIT member representatives continuing to associate the red chair with the problematic meanings that the campaign team had collectively edited out of the official campaign texts. In sum, my analysis illustrates the discursive processes through which the meanings of a red chair are debated, contested, and fought over by a host of various actors. This chapter thus provides answers to my first research question: how does NCWIT’s “Sit With Me” campaign rebrand “computing and I.T.” work for gender diversity and what discursive struggles are involved in this rebranding process?
Making a Red Chair Represent Support for Women in “Computing and I.T.”

A chair that happens to be red. On the surface, it doesn’t appear to be anything special. There are chairs wherever we go – in our homes, in our offices, at coffee shops, in waiting rooms, and the list goes on and on. Some of those chairs are red, and when they are, we don’t often think very much about the color beyond whether or not we find them visually appealing. But although red chairs appear to be banal material objects with no particular significance, the members of the “Sit With Me” campaign planning team sought out to make a particular red chair synonymous with the importance of increasing the importance of women’s participation in “computing and I.T.” work.

When the “Sit With Me” campaign planning team met for the first time on September 10th, 2010, on the campus of the University of Colorado Boulder, no one knew that the campaign they were about to develop would place so much emphasis on inscribing symbolic value into an otherwise banal red chair. What the members did know was that they were meeting to discuss ideas for a campaign that was intended to make the relatively abstract issue of women’s participation in “computing and I.T.” work more concrete. The campaign initiative came from the members of NCWIT’s Pacesetters program, which groups numerous organizations who are committed to increasing the numbers of technical women in their
organizations. In order to better coordinate the efforts between the multiple organizations that the Pacesetters program brings together, the Pacesetter representatives had asked NCWIT to develop an advocacy campaign in which multiple organizations would be able to participate. This request was the catalyst for the campaign that would eventually be known as “Sit With Me.”

There were eight people at the initial campaign meeting. One of the people sitting at this table was me, a PhD student who was just becoming familiar with his research site and who was largely unaware of what that day’s meeting was going to be about. I had only learned about this meeting the day before when the gatekeeper who had helped me negotiate access to my site let me know that NCWIT was about to launch a marketing campaign that she thought would be perfect to shadow for my dissertation work. I thus jumped on the opportunity and attended this meeting, which was my first experience “in the field” at an NCWIT related activity.

Understandably, when I arrived in the room that day, the only person whom I recognized was the gatekeeper who had helped me negotiate access to the organization. At the meeting, I was thus introduced to a number of people with whom I would be spending a lot of time over the next several years – and who would be crucial research participants in my burgeoning dissertation project. These participants were very diverse in both their roles and in their prior experiences. Indeed, there was the director of the organization, the communications director, the soon-to-be director of the
emerging campaign, two representatives from a social marketing firm, an external communication expert, and a social scientist who conducts research on issues related to women in “computing and I.T.” and who plays an important role in overseeing the content of official materials that NCWIT produces and distributes.

Ultimately, the campaign that came out of this meeting was based upon a red chair, which was intended to become a prominent symbol of the importance of increasing the number of women in “computing and I.T.” But why was a red chair chosen over something else? Why was the chair red instead of another color? And what are some alternative meanings of red chairs, as present in larger societal discourses? These are the three questions that I attend to in my subsequent analysis that documents the discursive struggles and turns that led to the birth and to the development of a campaign which set out to make a red chair represent support for women in “computing and I.T.”.

Deciding Upon a Campaign Theme

Why was the “Sit With Me” campaign concept chosen over another idea? After all, “Sit With Me” was only one of three campaign ideas that were presented to the campaign team by a marketing firm that NCWIT had hired; two other ideas were presented as campaign possibilities by the marketing firm.
One of the alternative ideas, which was by far seen as the most controversial, was entitled “I am not a woman, I am a technologist.” Instead of a red chair being the emblem of this campaign, the emblem was an image with a silhouette of a person speaking about her or his technological contributions. The actual picture of the person is absent, so we do not know who is speaking – and most importantly, we are unable to distinguish whether the silhouette is of a woman or a man because everyone has the same silhouette. One of the representatives from the marketing team stated that the strength of this campaign lies in telling stories about experience and achievement rather than telling stories about gender. Indeed, he stated that the campaign would enable women in “computing and I.T.” to identify as a technologist first and a woman second, rather than the other way around.

As the representative from the marketing firm was presenting this idea to the NCWIT staff members present, I could already sense some dissatisfaction with this campaign idea. For instance, one member of the campaign team and I made eye contact and exchanged non-verbal expressions of exasperation and disapproval in regards to the campaign that had been envisioned by the marketing firm. Personally, I found that a campaign based on these principles would be not only unsuccessful, but harmful because of its denial of the multiple identifications that people can have beyond their occupation and their gender, as well as the ways in which such a campaign would essentially mask the real issues that the campaign
was seeking to address: obstacles that women in “computing and I.T.” face.

Furthermore, removing gender from the campaign is one way to imply that all people in this field should be treated the same, which is problematic as it denies that the abstract worker in many occupational fields, including “computing and I.T.,” is a particular type of man and therefore assumes that for women (and many men) to be successful in this field, they must simply act and behave like the ruling class of men who embody and perform hegemonic masculinity (Acker, 1990; R. W. Connell, 2005). This view is antithetical to the views of many feminist scholars who have convincingly argued that in order to achieve gender equality and parity, we must reform gendered, raced, and classed institutions themselves, as opposed to simply getting more women into existing institutions through an “add women and stir” approach (Acker, 1990, 2006; Wood, 2013).

I was clearly not the only one to have concerns with the “I am not a woman” campaign concept; the reactions were very negative from all of the NCWIT staff members on the campaign team. One person stated that the concept was problematic because she would like to be both a woman and a technologist. Another person concurred, stating that it would be problematic if people have to give up a part of their identity in order to work in this field. Furthermore, another member of the campaign team went as far as to say that this campaign idea scared her in all kinds of ways because it would present people with a choice on whether or not they are a woman or a
technologist, which she said is inconsistent with the research literature that shows that gender identity tends to be deeply ingrained into individuals from a very young age because of socialization processes and that it’s something that many people will not be willing to give up just to pursue a career as a technologist.

Comments such as the ones that I have exemplified above effectively prevented any further consideration of the “I am not a woman” campaign concept. The marketing representative who had presented the concept did not try to defend it in any way; rather than addressing the concerns expressed about the “I am not a woman” campaign, he emphasized the virtues of the two other campaign concepts that he presented and that were incontestably more popular among the NCWIT staff members at this meeting. One of the ways that he deemphasized the unpopular “I am not a woman” campaign was to state explicitly that he predicted that the other two campaign ideas that he presented would be significantly more popular. This was clearly a smart discursive move, especially considering the marketing representative’s identification as a “man.” Indeed, this identification would surely have given him little credibility when arguing to a group of people who identify as “women” that they should choose between being either “women” or “technologists”. Furthermore, all of the people who expressed concerns with this campaign concept were the very people who had commissioned the campaign and hired the marketing representative, and they thus had a clear
sense of what they were looking for and what they were not looking for. The negative comments about the “I am not a woman” campaign thus ended all discussion about this campaign topic, which was never presented to NCWIT member representatives at large and which was never brought up again in any future campaign meetings.

The representative from the marketing firm presented another campaign concept that received much more consideration but that was not ultimately chosen: “Re-Frame It.” As the representative from the marketing team put it, the whole idea of the campaign was to re-frame the current situation of women facing gender-specific challenges in “computing and I.T.” to imagine what it would be like if men were the ones who were facing those challenges. The marketing firm representative presented this concept as very playful, as is evident when he stated: “What if women in I.T. could create an opposite day? Wouldn’t that be fun?” Humor was thus incorporated into this campaign idea much more than in the “I am not a woman” campaign. The symbol of this campaign was not a silhouette of a genderless technologist nor a red chair, but instead a frame that showed pictures of how things could be different. For instance, the campaign team was presented with pictures that appeared to be from the 1950s and 1960s, but with everyone at the table being women except for one token man. The avowed purpose of these pictures was to enable a male audience to recognize how many women currently perceive the work environment of technology
organizations by placing men in the positions that many women find themselves in.

Everyone depicted in these pictures was white, but race was not brought up either by the person presenting this idea or by anyone else in the room that day – myself included. However, I did notice the whiteness of the pictures and wrote about my concerns with these pictures in my fieldnotes. Today, I see even more how the marketing representative’s exclusion of bodies of color in these pictures masked whiteness by presenting it as the invisible norm in organizational settings (Grimes, 2002). Whiteness became normalized because white people were the only racial group considered in these pictures; racial “difference” was invisible. However, I did not express my concerns at the meeting considering my “newcomer” status at NCWIT and that I wasn’t sure how much I was expected to participate.

The reactions to the “Re-Frame It” campaign were quite nuanced and the campaign idea received serious consideration from the campaign team. One of the participants at the first campaign meeting stated that the message of the campaign was clear and that she liked the campaign’s use of humor. Another participant stated that the campaign summarized perfectly what they were trying to do, which is to change common perceptions about gender and “computing and I.T.” and to say that if we are going to be successful at getting more women into this field, we need to re-frame the ways that we think about it. In addition, she stated that the humor would be
a great hook to get people involved. A male communication consultant at the meeting stated that he liked the “Re-Frame It” campaign because it shows men what jerks they can be, which could guilt them into doing more to promote women in “computing and I.T.”.

However, there were some concerns with the “Re-Frame It” campaign, some of which surfaced immediately and some of which surfaced only later when this concept was presented to the NCWIT Pacesetter representatives. For instance, although one male participant at the initial campaign meeting stated that this campaign would succeed at showing men what jerks they can be, another female participant was concerned that this campaign would have the potential to offend men. Another NCWIT staff member present at the initial meeting stated that her concern with the “Re-Frame It” campaign was that NCWIT does not seek to reverse the roles so that women are dominant and men are challenged, but that some campaign audiences may think that is the case upon seeing pictures of women dominating organizational meetings and life.

The biggest concerns to be expressed about “Re-Frame It” and that ultimately led to the campaign idea being nixed were not expressed at the first campaign meeting, but only when the campaign team presented this concept to Pacesetter representatives at a September 2010 meeting in Atlanta, Georgia. Interestingly for scholars of difference and occupational segregation, the concerns that were expressed at this meeting and that
ultimately led to the campaign not being chosen were about race and
whiteness – issues that were not addressed in the initial campaign meeting.
In an interview account of this meeting, one white NCWIT staff member
stated that “African-American folks were like: the 1950s and 1960s was a
really bad time in the world for us, so we don’t resonate with that.” Indeed,
as a self-identified African-American Pacesetter representative told me in an
interview, the “Re-Frame It” campaign and its images of white people from
the 1950s and 1960s did not appeal to her because, as she put it, “excuse me
but my people, we don’t want to go back to the 50s, thank you very much.”
This African-American Pacesetter representative thus felt that showing
1950s style pictures of white women controlling white men to underscore the
difficulties of women in contemporary “computing and I.T.” workplaces re-
centered whiteness and failed to take into account that in the 1950s and
1960s, the state of racial segregation in U.S. workplaces was just as bad, if
not worse, than the state of sex segregation. As a result, and as stated by
another African-American Pacesetter representative, the “Re-Frame It”
campaign wouldn’t be able to resonate as much with African-American
populations, because you need to be white in order to find the humor in the
pictures.

Ultimately, the general consensus that emerged from the Pacesetters
meeting was that “Re-Frame It” was not the best avenue for NCWIT to
pursue. Indeed, the concerns about the whiteness of the “Re-Frame It”
campaign that were expressed by African-American representatives effectively prevented the “Re-Frame It” campaign from being either chosen or further considered. Pursuing the “Re-Frame It” campaign in spite of the concerns raised by African-American representatives would have run the serious risk of both the campaign and NCWIT being deemed racist on at least three accounts: (1) white people developing a campaign that is easier for white people to identify with, (2) white people erroneously assuming that the obstacles that white women face are same as those that women of color face, and (3) white people dismissing the concerns of individuals from other racial groups by claiming that the latter were overreacting or being too sensitive. Moreover, NCWIT as an organization could not risk facing criticism that it developed a racist campaign that implicitly views the concerns of “women” as the concerns of “white women” because to be labeled racist would seriously diminish NCWIT’s credibility as an organization, especially in light of its repeated claims to be inclusive.

As stated previously, it is notable that until the “Re-Frame It” concept was presented to the Pacesetter representatives, there had been no explicit talk about whether or not the campaign idea was racially inclusive or not. Perhaps this is because everyone who had been part of the campaign team up until that point was white. In that sense, we see how the whiteness of the “Re-Frame It” campaign was invisible to the white campaign team until they presented the campaign to a racially diverse audience. In other words, race
only became part of the campaign when the (white) campaign team presented it to people of color; race had been invisible up until that point and whiteness had been the campaign’s invisible norm (Grimes, 2002). This shows that a group committed to disrupting privilege on one axis (gender) can unintentionally end up reifying it on another axis (race), an insight to which I am indebted to Katie Harris.

Some white people on the campaign team who had a strong preference for “Re-Frame It” were disappointed that this campaign was not chosen, saying that a quick fix would have been to make the faces portrayed in the retro images more diverse. Such a move, however, would have inevitably denied the fundamental racial segregation of almost all aspects of U.S. society during the 1950s and 1960s by putting diverse faces in places where there weren’t any at the time. But regardless of whether or not individual members of the campaign team thought that the “Re-Frame It” campaign had undesirable racist connotations, the risks of both NCWIT and the campaign being labeled “racist” by some Pacesetter representatives had a determining effect on the ultimate decision to nix the “Re-Frame It” campaign and pursue the third campaign idea that NCWIT’s marketing firm had developed: the “Sit With Me” campaign.

Like the “I am not a woman” campaign and the “Re-Frame It” campaign, the “Sit With Me” campaign was presented by a representative from NCWIT’s marketing firm at the first campaign team meeting. He
described the campaign as a social movement composed of people who are sitting down to ask other people to join the movement, with the central idea being that “sometimes you have to sit down to stand up” and take a stand. Essentially, the people who are sitting would be sitting to inspire more women to participate in technology and would ask more women and men to sit with them. They would also be sitting to raise awareness about what the marketing firm representative called the “crisis” that is facing the field of “computing and I.T.”. He stated that there would be numerous advantages of such a campaign, as it is simple, constructive, and friendly to men.

Interestingly, although the marketing firm representative had included pictures of a red chair in his presentation slides and a red chair would become not only a symbol of but also the driving force behind this campaign, there was very little explicit consideration about the significance of the red chair when this campaign idea was first presented to the team. Much more emphasis was placed upon the campaign’s messages, such as “sit with me to take a stand.” Some concerns were initially expressed by members of the campaign team – such as the ambiguity surrounding what people are sitting for and why people are sitting if they are trying to take a stand on an issue – but most campaign members who were at the original meeting stated that this was their preferred campaign idea. “Sit With Me” was praised for its overall community feel, for the way in which it gives voice to all people who think that women should have a voice in “computing and
I.T.,” and for its inclusivity. Indeed, one African-American Pacesetter representative who had expressed concerns about the whiteness of the “Re-Frame It” idea stated that the “Sit With Me” campaign felt much more inclusive and that she found its message to be stronger: we don’t have to reframe the situation of women in “computing and I.T.,” but we need to change and reinvent this field to make it inclusive of all people. Because of the “Sit With Me” campaign’s popularity, the racist undertones of the “Re-Frame It” campaign, and only these campaign options being presented to the Pacesetters, the Pacesetters rallied very strongly around the “Sit With Me” campaign and collectively decided at their meeting to choose this campaign idea over “Re-Frame It.”

Ultimately, once the “Sit With Me” campaign was chosen, the only further discussions regarding the “Re-Frame It” campaign concept were informal. In interviews, some campaign members expressed that they had a strong preference for “Re-Frame It” and, more than a year after “Sit With Me” had been chosen, were still disappointed that the “Re-Frame It” idea had been nixed. One staff member, who wasn’t on the initial campaign team and who had thus never heard of “Re-Frame It,” told me that she noticed the retro pictures associated with “Re-Frame It” in the office of another staff member and that she liked them – and that when she asked about those pictures, the other staff member stated “Oh, well, that’s what got nixed in favor of ‘Sit With Me’”. Clearly, the staff member who had these pictures up in her office
continued to feel that “Re-Frame It” would have made a better campaign than “Sit With Me,” something that she explicitly confirmed to me in an interview.

Nevertheless, once “Sit With Me” was chosen at the Pacesetters meetings, there were no further discursive opportunities to voice concerns against it. One member of the campaign team stated at numerous campaign meetings that prominent people in the field have told her that the “Sit With Me” campaign is the “most amazing thing you could imagine” and “the best thing to have happened to technical women in 25 years.” Invoking these prominent names and the comments that they reportedly made thus served as a discursive strategy to silence opposition to the campaign, especially by those who continued to feel that “Re-Frame It” would have been a better campaign concept.

Whenever I asked people why they feel “Sit With Me” had been chosen over “Re-Frame It,” the vast majority stated that they found that the “Sit With Me” campaign was the most inviting and inclusive campaign possible. Consequently, “Sit With Me” was seen as not running the risk of alienating people, especially people of color, like the “Re-Frame It” campaign did. A major factor in pursuing the “Sit With Me” campaign idea was thus that it was seen as a safe, inviting, and politically correct campaign choice.

As we have seen, deciding upon a theme for the campaign was a process that was marked by a prominent discursive struggle regarding
inclusivity. Although the (predominately white) campaign team had not originally considered how the “Re-Frame It” campaign could be non-inclusive of or offensive to people of color, concerns about the campaign eventually expressed by people of color effectively sealed the fate of “Re-Frame It” and led to the “Sit With Me” campaign, which was seen as more inclusive, being chosen. Some white campaign team members continued to see “Re-Frame It” as a better idea and seemed to downplay the concerns expressed by people of color, but because NCWIT could not politically risk being charged of creating a campaign that could be deemed racist, the campaign team’s choice of “Sit With Me” over “Re-Frame It” was not up for negotiation once the Pacesetters had chosen it. Once the “Sit With Me” campaign was chosen, however, how did it continue to develop? How did the emblem of the campaign – a red chair – come to materialize the campaign and what meanings did the red chair acquire? I explore these questions below.

Creating a Symbol and Ventriloquizing It

As previously discussed, the red chair was a part of the “Sit With Me” campaign from the very moment that it was presented to the campaign team by the marketing firm representative. Nevertheless, relatively little emphasis was placed on this emblem about the campaign at first and the aesthetic and symbolic qualities of the red chair played much less of a role in choosing the “Sit With Me” concept than concerns that the “Re-Frame It” campaign could be deemed offensive or racist by people of color. However, as
I show below, once “Sit With Me” had been chosen as the campaign’s theme, the red chair quickly became the central organizing feature of the campaign, so much so that NCWIT member representatives began to call the “Sit With Me” campaign the “Red Chair” campaign.

In order to understand the importance of the red chair to the campaign, it’s important to consider why the chair would be red as opposed to any other color. What does the color red represent in larger societal discourses? Would another color be more suitable to the campaign? In these regards, there was no consensus about the chair’s color. Two distinct viewpoints were expressed at the meeting during which the color of the chair was ultimately decided: several campaign team members preferred lime green and other campaign team members preferred red. Those who preferred a lime green chair argued that lime green is the official NCWIT color; therefore, having a lime green chair would bring more visibility to NCWIT as an organization and to NCWIT’s work beyond this particular campaign. However, other campaign team members argued though that red was the boldest color possible and that the red chair catches the eye more than the lime green chair, which would ultimately give the campaign more visibility. As can be seen from these two viewpoints, the discursive struggle over the color of the chair was largely about the campaign’s visibility: whether we should choose the color that would bring the most visibility to the campaign (considered to be red) or the color that would bring the most visibility to
NCWIT (considered to be lime green). In both of these cases the campaign team was attempting to inscribe desired meanings into a chair so that when people see this chair, they will be reminded of the “Sit With Me” campaign and/or NCWIT as an organization. The chair was thus seen as having the capabilities of presentifying particular entities and discourses in the different places that it would be placed: the “Sit With Me” campaign, NCWIT as an organization, or both. Here, presentification refers to a phenomenon through which a collective entity, such as the “Sit With Me” campaign, is made present by other entities, such as the red chair, that appear to materialize or incarnate it (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009; Cooren, 2006).

Ultimately, red was chosen as the color of the chair that would become the emblem of the campaign and there was relatively little debate before the decision was made. As one campaign team member who preferred lime green voiced on the conference call during which the color of the chair was decided, the tone of the conversation was such that it seemed as though red had already been chosen. Indeed, shortly after the topic of the chair’s color was brought up and the two preferences had been expressed, the leader of the call stated “let’s go with the red” before moving on to the next topic, which functioned as a discursive closure and prevented further discussion and debate about the color. Ultimately then, the chair’s color was decided by the campaign team member with the most positional power. She invoked the boldness of red as the principal reason why she considered red to be the best
color, which again is significant because it shows that she is counting on the red chair to make the campaign tangible and visible in various settings.

Little attention was paid to meanings and significations of these colors in larger societal discourses. Besides one staff member stating that red is perceived as an angry color in China, there was no explicit consideration as to any other meanings that red can invoke in people – meanings such as passion, emotions, blood, danger, and power. Because red was chosen as the color of the chair on the basis of its visibility and boldness rather than on the basis of any particular meanings of the color red in larger discourses, the most important function of the chair seems to have been imagined as grabbing people’s attention and making the campaign highly visible. As such, the bold red chair is seen as being able to draw attention to the campaign in a way that individual campaign team members can’t. The chair and the campaign team members can thus be seen as “partners in action” (Benoit-Barné, 2007, p. 217), as campaign team members envision the chair as giving the campaign visibility in unique ways. As such, the chair is seen as being able to materialize the campaign by making it visible and physically tangible.

However, what the red chair is making present is not self-evident. The red chair may be highly visible and grab people’s attention, but once it grabs people’s attention, people unfamiliar with the campaign will not automatically make the connection between the red chair and the importance
of having women in “computing and I.T.” work. Even people who are familiar with the campaign, including Pacesetter representatives, don’t fully understand the connection between the red chair and the campaign’s messages. When I asked one Pacesetter representative what he thought about the chair at a Pacesetters meeting in Boulder in October 2011, he told me that he didn’t “get” the concept of the chair and that its association with the importance of women in “computing and I.T.” work is “not natural.” Even NCWIT member representatives who plan to display the chair at events that they are organizing don’t always make the connection between the red chair and the importance of women in “computing and I.T.” work, as is evident in the following excerpt from an interview:

Jamie: I was wondering if you saw any symbolic value in the chair? Does it represent anything to you in particular?

Representative: I don’t think so. No, not currently.

It is thus clear that although the chair may be visible and grab people’s attention, it does not always make the campaign and the campaign’s messages visible. As one participant stated in an interview, “you don’t know what it is when you see a red chair sitting in a hallway and a bunch of people standing around it, right. That doesn’t tell you anything.” As such, the chair needs to be *spoken for* so that it can actually make the campaign and its messages visible and present. In the terms of Cooren (2010, 2012), participants in the “Sit With Me” campaign need to “ventriloquize” the chair by speaking about what it represents and, in the process, give it meaning.
Indeed, it is only by ventriloquizing the chair that it can come to represent the campaign and its messages. One of the key ways in which the chair is ventriloquized is by having pictures and videos taken of various NCWIT allies sitting in the red chair and having them explain why they are sitting in the chair and, more specifically, why they are sitting for the future of I.T.

When defining agency as “making a difference” (Cooren, 2006, p. 82) in any given interaction, the red chair can certainly be seen as exercising a certain level of agency. To people who are familiar with the campaign, the chair *represents, makes present, and reminds them of* the campaign. For instance, one NCWIT staff member told me in an interview that when she saw a gigantic red chair outside of the Denver Art Museum, she immediately thought of the campaign even though NCWIT had nothing to do with the presence of the chair outside the museum. At another level, the chair’s agency can be seen in that it *captures people’s attention and starts conversations* about the campaign. Indeed, some participants told me that when they placed a red chair in their office, several people noticed the chair and asked about it, which resulted in a conversation about the campaign and the importance of increasing the representation of women in “computing and I.T.” work. Moreover, NCWIT attaches a luggage tag with a QR code to the chair when it is displayed at particular events. When the QR code is scanned with a mobile device, the phone’s internet browser is directed to the campaign’s website. As a result, the chair has the potential to exercise
agency by *informing* people of the chair’s significance and the campaign’s messages when they scan the QR code with their phone. In all of these ways, the chair can thus be seen as an agent that shapes interactions about the campaign in various settings.

However, like any agent, the red chair can act and be spoken for in unintended ways. As we saw earlier, the campaign team never discussed alternative meanings and interpretations of the red chair and other societal discourses, nor entities that the red chair may represent beyond “Sit With Me.” As I show in my analysis below, red chairs are simultaneously being invoked to represent vastly different things in other societal discourses and, as such, the red chair presentifies much more than the “Sit With Me” campaign; it also presentifies, among many other things, artwork, a realty company, and New England bed and breakfasts.

For instance, when I was celebrating Denver Pride in June 2012 at Civic Center Park in downtown Denver, I noticed a giant red chair: one that is twenty-one feet tall and ten feet wide. The chair’s form closely resembles the chair that has become the emblem of the Sit With Me campaign, as the picture below shows:
According to the Denver Public Library’s website, the chair, which is named “The Yearling,” spent 1997 in New York’s Central Park before it traveled to Denver in 1998 for permanent installation. The red chair that represents the “Sit With Me” campaign can thus also make present and invoke artwork and the Yearling’s sculptor, Donald Lipski.

Also in June 2012, I was biking around Denver when I saw a “for sale” sign with the words “Red Chair Realty” written on it. Intrigued by how this company’s symbolic use of the red chair would fit within the discourse of NCWIT’s “Sit With Me” campaign, I visited this company’s website upon returning home that evening. As shown in the image below, the red chair featured on the company’s logo resembles very closely the red chair that has become the emblem of the Sit With Me campaign, as well as the giant red chair that sits outside the Denver Art Museum:

The company’s website states that Red Chair Realty distinguishes itself from other realtors because their business is “focused on the total experience of the client, not just another closing.” Red chairs can thus not only presentify the “Sit With Me” campaign and artwork, but also a realty company and its branding efforts.
One last and particularly poignant example that illustrates how red chairs evoke much more than the “Sit With Me” campaign takes us to the website “Red Chair Travels.” This is an intriguing website that shows how a Cap Cod innkeeper has started what she calls a “movement” whose emblem is a red chair. This red chair resembles very closely the red chair that has become the emblem of the “Sit With Me” campaign, as seen in the images below that are copied from the website of Red Chair Travels:

The innkeeper explains that her guests have felt inspired by the chair and that she decided to send “the red chair to the best inns and B&B’s all over Cape Cod. . . Provincetown, Martha’s Vineyard, Nantucket, Chatham.” Afterwards, she decided to send the chair all around New England, including to “the coast of Maine, the White Mountains, the Green Mountains, Mt. Washington, and Golden Pond.” Her goal is to send the red chair to the best bed and breakfasts in New England and to have the red chair inspire people “to visit New England, to travel, and to live life to its fullest.” The red chair that has become the emblem of the “Sit With Me” campaign thus has the
potential to evoke, in addition to artwork, a realty company, the campaign itself, and New England bed and breakfasts.

The above analysis leads me to re-conceptualizing Cooren’s (2006) notion of presentification. In his work, Cooren (2006) explains that an organization’s ontology can best be conceptualized through how an organization is made present by a variety of entities that materialize it: the organization’s logo, the organization’s mission statement, the organization’s employee handbook, and so on. These entities are thus seen as making present – and only making present – the organization and its members. But we have seen in my above analysis that the material entities that constitute organizations and social movements can also have a large variety of meanings; as such, these entities make present not only particular organizations and their members, but a whole host of societal discourses. The red chair, for instance, is an entity that materializes the “Sit With Me” campaign and can thus invoke this campaign, but the “Sit With Me” campaign’s red chair can also invoke Red Chair Realty, the Yearling, and a movement to encourage people to travel to New England. I thus re-conceptualize presentification as a process through which a material entity makes present not just one collective entity or movement, but multiple societal discourses and/or collective entities.

Put differently, whereas Cooren (2006) argues that “a collective entity can be made present through a variety of entities that appear to materialize
or incarnate it” (p. 91), my analysis has shown that multiple collective entities can simultaneously be made present through entities because an entity (such as the red chair) always has meaning that transcends a given context. For instance, the Yearling presentified “Sit With Me” not only to me, but to an interview participant who also saw the Yearling as she was walking by the Denver Art Museum. In this case, the Yearling is presentifying both the Denver Art Museum and the “Sit With Me” campaign. Consequently, in order to understand everything that is made present in an interaction by an entity, we must consider possible interpretations from both large societal discourses and situated interactions, which is why these entities must always be ventriloquized in order to become associated with a particular meaning. Presentification and ventriloquism are thus two intertwined concepts: in the way that I have conceptualized them here, presentification refers to an entity that makes present multiple collective entities, whereas ventriloquism refers to an entity being spoken for in order to make this entity represent only one collective entity (out of the many that it may otherwise represent).

My analysis has shown us the significance of material objects that are used to symbolize and presentify collective entities such as the “Sit With Me” campaign. The materiality of the red chair matters because it can presentify, in addition to the “Sit With Me” campaign, different societal discourses than another material entity, such as a red ribbon, would presentify. If a red ribbon had been chosen as the emblem of the campaign, the ribbon would not
only invoke the “Sit With Me” campaign, but also awareness about HIV and AIDS. Likewise, if a rainbow had been chosen as the symbol of the campaign, the rainbow would also represent LGBT movements. Consequently, “the surface on which cultural meanings are inscribed is not featureless” (R. W. Connell, 2005, p. 51); we cannot deny the materiality and physical characteristics of the surface on which we inscribe cultural meanings because that surface already has alternative significations and meanings in larger societal discourses.

In this section of this analysis chapter, I have made the following claims about how the “Sit With Me” campaign rebrands “computing and I.T.” work for gender diversity and the discursive struggles involved in this rebranding process:

(1) The “Sit With Me” campaign was ultimately chosen over “Re-Frame It” because the former was seen as being more racially inclusive than the former, although no considerations of race had been accounted for by the mostly white campaign team until it presented these campaign ideas to a broader and racially diverse audience. As such, choosing “Sit With Me” over “Re-Frame” implicated discursive struggles about race and whiteness between individual campaign team members and individual NCWIT member representatives and Pacesetters.

(2) The red chair, which materializes the “Sit With Me” campaign, is an important actor that helps draws attention to the campaign, starts
conversations about the campaign and its messages, and even informs people about the campaign. However, the red chair only presentifies the campaign to the extent that it is spoken for and ventriloquized by NCWIT member representatives and Pacesetters who discuss its association with the campaign, as it also invokes a whole host of societal discourses that the campaign team did not consider.

As the red chair presentifies the campaign only to the extent that it is spoken for and ventriloquized by NCWIT member representatives, we must examine how the red chair is spoken for and what meanings it acquires as it is ventriloquized by various people. Examining how the red chair is spoken for thus enables us to see the multiple and contested meanings that it is given as different people invoke it to discuss the “Sit With Me” campaign. Through my analysis, I identify three discursive moves through which the chair acquires these multiple meanings. By discursive move, I refer to moments in the campaign’s development when the discourse surrounding the campaign served particular functions. In the following sections of this analysis chapter, I highlight the functions of each of the campaign’s discursive moves in order to showcase the dilemmas and tensions that are inherent to occupational rebranding campaigns.
Discursive Move #1: Collecting Vernacular Discourse about the Significance of the Red Chair

Considering that the “Sit With Me” campaign’s success is dependent upon all NCWIT members and allies who speak on behalf of the campaign and its distinctive red chair, their participation in the campaign is crucial. As such, the “Sit With Me” campaign was meant to be participative and inclusive of all of NCWIT’s allies from its very inception. To enable as many people as possible to participate in the campaign, the first step of campaign’s rebranding process involved collecting discourse from NCWIT allies about what the campaign means to them, why they are sitting in the red chair, and why it’s important to support women in “computing and I.T.” work. The campaign’s first discursive move thus involved collecting vernacular, everyday discourse about the importance of women in “computing and I.T.” work from all NCWIT members and allies.

One of the ways through which the campaign team initially collected vernacular discourse was by attendees at the 2011 NCWIT summit to get their pictures taken in the red chair and respond to a questionnaire which asked them, among other things, why they were sitting for the future of I.T. However, an unintended function of this questionnaire was to constitute the audience of the campaign differently than what the campaign team had decided upon. For instance, male allies who support NCWIT’s work were seen as crucial to the success of the “Sit With Me” campaign from the
campaign’s very inception, so much so that during one of the first staff meetings that I attended during my fieldwork, one NCWIT staff member stated that 2011 would be the “year of the man” at NCWIT. Developing a campaign that is highly inclusive of men was thus a major preoccupation of the team. However, the questionnaire that it developed and distributed presumed a female rather than a male respondent and that only women would be sitting in the red chair for the future of I.T.

I noticed that the campaign audience was presumed to be women first hand when, while helping out at the 2011 NCWIT summit by asking people to fill out the questionnaires, I gave the questionnaire to a male computer science professor. As he was answering the questions, a puzzled look came upon on his face and I wondered why. Then I noticed which question he was hesitating to answer: “I am proud to be a woman in I.T. because. . .” He does not identify as a woman in I.T., but the questionnaire that he was filling out – and that we were asking everyone who was getting their picture taken to fill out, regardless of sex – hailed him as a woman. He ended up leaving the question blank, and my analysis of the questionnaires later revealed that men tended to either leave the question blank or just state that they were not women. Still though, a campaign that sought to be as inclusive as possible ironically put male allies in an awkward position by asking them why they were proud to be women. A discursive opportunity to ask people with multiple gender identifications what drives them to advocate for technical
women was thus lost. Not only is this a contradiction to NCWIT’s desire to make 2011 “the year of the man,” it illustrates how invoking identity categories othered participants in the campaign by normalizing the participation of particular groups (e.g., women) and not others (e.g., men and everyone who does not identify as either a woman or a man).

Ultimately, what did the questionnaires say about why people were sitting for the future of I.T. and why it is important to support women in this field? One undeniable theme that emerged from my analysis of the questionnaires is that people overwhelmingly invoked difference arguments when explaining why they were sitting to support women in I.T. These difference arguments go along the lines of: we need more women because women are different from men in x and y ways and they will thus create different technology than men do. Difference arguments about why it is important to have women in technology inevitably lead us to the trap of essentialism, which erroneously overemphasizes inter-group differences while minimalizing intra-group differences (Edley, 2000).

In order to exemplify the essentialism that characterized much of the vernacular discourse that the campaign team collected, I turn to two different “Sit With Me” video shoots with various NCWIT allies. The first one took place at the fall 2011 Pacesetters meeting and was intended to get footage that could be used in future videos that would promote the campaign. All of the Pacesetters thus sat in the red chair and were videotaped while they...
expressed their support for women in “computing and I.T.”. One of the Pacesetters, when it was his turn to sit in the chair, reproduced essentialist notions of gender by stating that “when men create things, they are black and gray and they will make noise; when women create things, there will be bright colors and it will be brilliant.” He is thus clearly making a case for having women in “computing and I.T.” that is based upon fundamental differences between all women and all men and that problematically assumes all women and all men to be the same. To my surprise, when this comment was made in front of the dozens of people who were present at the Pacesetters meeting and who had been asked to give the speakers feedback, there was no voiced opposition to its essentialism. Instead, the overall reaction was very positive and people commented on how they appreciated that he invoked his own kids in the story. Clearly then, many participants in the campaign either endorsed essentialist arguments for the importance of women in “computing and I.T.” or did not find them problematic enough to question them. Furthermore, by making these comments while sitting in the chair, this Pacesetter representative is associating the red chair with essentialist comments.

A video shoot at the 2011 summit also resulted in NCWIT allies associating essentialist discourse with the red chair and the “Sit With Me” campaign. One of the male interviewees stated during his interview that he believes that women should play a more important role in “computing and
I.T.” work because “women have a tendency of having a better connection with people and can bring in the emotional quotient.” He also stated that women will bring their emotions to the technology that they design, which will lead to a new generation of products being made. Male participants were far from being the only ones who evoke essentialist discourse, however. A female interviewee stated that women are nurturing, family-driven, and better at teamwork than men. Furthermore, she stated that women are able to juggle multiple responsibilities at once better than men can, which is a reason why we need more women in “computing and I.T.” All of the above comments are essentialist in that they assume vast commonalities among all women without taking into account either individual differences or how women are stratified among other social identities, such as race and sexuality.

If the above comments were to be reproduced in official “Sit With Me” texts, the campaign would be open to critiques that the reasons that the meanings of the red chair rests upon problematic essentialist discourse that does not do justice to the diversity that is masked by the terms “women” and “men.” Furthermore, presenting women and men as having different competencies runs the risk of undermining the technical competence of women by reinforcing the stereotype that men are better “technical thinkers” whereas women are more “emotional” and “nurturing.”
Of course, not all NCWIT allies who sat in the chair reproduced essentialist and stereotypical notions of gender. For instance, many invoke the red chair to claim that they are sitting because “we need ALL the good brains”, “it is the right thing”, as well as because “technology is so foundational to so much that we do today and we need to increase awareness of the opportunities for women in the field.” As such, in the first stages of the campaign in which people were asked to explain why they support women in “computing and I.T.,” the red chair acquired multiple and contradictory meanings, as people stated that they were sitting it for reasons as diverse as “it is the right thing” and “women can bring in the emotional quotient.” How, then, does the campaign go about selecting excerpts from the vernacular discourse that it collected to create official campaign texts? And which meanings of women in “computing and I.T.” will these texts attach to the red chair? In the next section of this analysis, I provide answers to these questions by highlighting the campaign’s second discursive move: the development of official campaign texts by editing out “undesirable” vernacular discourse that was collected.

**Discursive Move #2: Developing Official Campaign Texts Through Editing Out Undesirable Vernacular Discourse**

In order for the “Sit With Me” campaign to reach the greatest number of people, the campaign team produced official texts that are easily accessible to the general public. For instance, the campaign has an official website
which contains texts such as promotional videos, fact sheets, and stories from NCWIT allies about what they do to promote women in “computing and I.T.” and why they believe that it is important to do so. These official campaign texts emerged from the interactions of campaign team members who debated about both the content and form of these materials. Ultimately, the principal question that was debated while making these texts was: what meanings do we want to associate with the “Sit With Me” brand and the red chair? As such, the texts ultimately represent the dominant meanings of the red chair and the campaign that emerged from discursive struggles among the different members of the campaign team.

As mentioned above, the process of producing official campaign texts involved numerous exchanges between campaign team members about what messages these texts should convey and what form they would take. Individual members of the campaign team often had very different conceptions about which meanings to attach to the red chair and which discourse should be left out of the official texts. Given the diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise of the campaign members, that is not surprising. The campaign team consisted of social scientists with expertise on the research literature on gender and “computing and I.T.” work; consultants with expertise in developing marketing campaigns to various audiences; information technologists who have worked in the field and who have access to a large network of influential technical thinkers; and other
staff members with expertise in media relations and in technical design. Consequently, the “Sit With Me” campaign team cannot be seen as one homogenous group. Rather, the campaign team members all brought their own interests and expertise to the discussions that led to the creation of the official campaign materials.

The biggest tensions among the different members of the campaign team arose around what vernacular discourse to include in and/or exclude from the official campaign texts; in other words, what meanings should these texts attach to the chair and the campaign? For instance, when two members of the campaign team with marketing expertise drafted a video that was to be showcased on NCWIT’s website, the video was met with at least some hostility by all of the other members of the campaign team. The draft of the video, which was produced in the summer of 2011, presented excerpts from the interviews that had been video-recorded with NCWIT member representatives at the May 2011 summit while they were sitting in the red chair. The first draft of the video included a section entitled “I.T.’s about the skills women bring” and contained many excerpts of the video recordings where the participants argue that women bring a distinct set of skills to I.T. because they are, in their words, “more collaborative,” “nurturing,” and “better communicators.” For instance, one female participant stated that “women are creative and women are good at communication” whereas a male participant stated that “women have a tendency of better connections with
people and abilities to bring their emotional quotient into the mix and into the communication.”

The above comments that the video producers included in the video’s first draft were subject to intense scrutiny by several other members of the campaign team, particularly those with expertise in social science research. An e-mail conversation ensued in which individual members of the campaign team made different requests for the video to be modified. One important modification that was requested by a member of the social science team was to edit out essentialist discourse that portrays women as “nurturing,” “emotional,” and “better communicators.” She wrote that we needed to get rid of the entire section entitled “I.T.’s about the skills women bring” by editing out the clips “about collaboration, nurturing, communication and substituting them with comments about bringing a range of perspectives and women being smart, good technical thinkers.”

The above requests were ultimately made and incorporated into the final draft of the video that was produced. Essentialist comments that reinforce gender stereotypes that were made by NCWIT member representatives while they were sitting in the red chair were thus silenced and deleted from the official video that the “Sit With Me” campaign team created. Instead of presenting excerpts that reinforced gender stereotypes and essentialist discourse, the final cut of the video portrayed NCWIT allies saying comments such as: “I ended up being the leader of the organization
and men were on my team” and “I believe that women should pursue this field because we need all hands on deck.” But an important question to consider is what discursive struggles ensued among the campaign team between the first cut and the final cut of the video? In other words, how does the final cut of the video reflect the beliefs and interests of some campaign members, but not others?

My experiences as a participant observer on the campaign team enabled me to see that not all campaign team members had the same level of authority; some had greater cultural capital than others and were recognized as more authoritative figures. One campaign team member, who has a PhD and who is recognized as an expert on the research literature on gender and “computing and I.T.” work, went so far as confiding to me in an interview that people think of her as the “thought police” because she frequently receives e-mails asking her to approve NCWIT texts, thus giving her the authority to revise comments she finds problematic. When I asked in the interview what she does when she is asked to approve comments such as “women are so nurturing,” she laughed and responded that she says: “Delete that!” Indeed, when she saw comments that portrayed women in stereotypical ways in the first draft of the video that the marketing experts had produced, she did request that all of those comments and an entire section of the video be deleted. This campaign team member is thus able to edit essentialist and stereotypical discourse out of official campaign texts by
capitalizing upon her status and her expertise. Consequently, the ways that the red chair is invoked in these texts closely reflect her vision of the campaign and its messages.

However, not all campaign team members wanted to edit essentialist and stereotypical discourse out of the campaign. For instance, the first cut of the video, which included headings such as “I.T.’s about the skills women bring” and excerpts where member representatives mention that women are better communicators and more nurturing than men, was produced by a campaign team member with extensive marketing expertise. When asked to replace stereotypical comments in the video with comments that emphasize that women are great technical thinkers, he wrote, in an e-mail to the campaign team, that “we have selected the best content available from our day of shooting.” He thus implied that he and his partner at the marketing firm – not other people on the campaign team – had viewed all of the available footage and that they had the expertise to know which footage was best. In the second cut of the video, the producer had cut some of the stereotypical discourse as the social scientist had requested be deleted, but left in other problematic discourse that she had requested be edited out.

After visioning the second cut of the video, she wrote back:

I still soooo dislike the comment at the very beginning... I just hate starting off this video so early with him saying “it’s just really hard to find women; they’re just not interested” – whine whine whine, so NOT the message we want to send and so often the readily used excuse that corporations give... I think most of [the video] is awesome but also
think it’s important to really get it right.

By stating that it was important to cut additional excerpts from the video in order to “get it right,” she implied that she knew best what it would take to make the best video and that it would be essential to make additional cuts so that the official campaign texts don’t associate the red chair with meanings that she deems problematic. There were no explicit challenges to her request and in the next and final cut of the video, her requests had all been taken up.

The removal of stereotypical and essentialist discourse from the video thus reflected the wishes and worldview of the campaign team member with social science expertise; if it had been up to the marketing expert, stereotypical and essentialist discourse would have remained in the video. As such, it is clear that the campaign team does not speak with a unified voice and that official campaign discourse, such as this video, cannot be seen as representing the viewpoints of all people on the campaign team.

Another example of discursive struggle among the members of the campaign team regards whether or not the official campaign discourse would make any references to Rosa Parks. For instance, one influential member of the campaign team, who has access to an extensive network of leaders in the field, strongly believes that drawing connections between the chair and the story of Rosa Parks could help the campaign. As Rosa Parks is known for being an African-American who sat in a bus seat which was reserved for white people, an act that served as an important catalyst to the civil rights
movement, this campaign team member believed that drawing on the story of Rosa Parks is an intriguing way of illustrating one of the key punch lines of the “Sit With Me” campaign: sitting to take a stand. In an e-mail that she sent to the campaign team, she wrote that whenever she talks about the campaign, she mentions Rosa Parks and “everyone gets it instantly.” Consequently, she ventriloquizes the red chair by stating that the red chair is just like the chair that Rosa Parks sat in.

However, not all members of the campaign team agree. Several campaign team members openly told me in interviews that they find the connection with Rosa Parks to be problematic and do not want the red chair to be associated with her story. One point of concern is that by drawing too heavily on the story of Rosa Parks, the campaign team could risk diminishing the important struggles during the civil rights movement by equating the state of African-American women in U.S. society prior to the civil rights movement with the concerns of contemporary privileged, middle-class, mostly white women. Thus, an important discursive struggle ensued over the meaning of the chair and whether the campaign team should associate it with Rosa Parks.

In the official texts that were produced by the campaign team, there were no references to Rosa Parks. What is interesting, however, is that campaign team members only expressed their concerns about the story of Rosa Parks in interviews with me, but not in conversation with each other.
Rather, the campaign team members who had concerns about relating “Sit With Me” to Rosa Parks were able to keep references to Rosa Parks out of the campaign by simply avoiding the topic and not responding to requests to make references to her in the official texts. As the member of the campaign team who was the most adamant about including references to Rosa Parks told me in an interview:

I’ll say stuff like: “Can we mention Rosa Parks on the website?” and it doesn’t really get on there. It’s just a little more passive aggressiveness. Nobody wants to say no, but when it doesn’t happen, I’m no fool, it means they don’t want to do it.

As such, discursive struggles about what to include and exclude from official campaign texts were not always openly discussed and debated. Members of the campaign team who were responsible for producing the official texts were able to keep the story of Rosa Parks out of the official materials by silently denying requests to mention her. Because some discursive struggles about the meanings of the red chair were thus won through silence rather than through verbal argument, some lengthy and potentially divisive debates among the members of the campaign team were avoided, but so were discursive opportunities to collectively reflect on the meanings of the chair and the messages of the campaign.

This section of the analysis has enabled us to see how the campaign team members draw from the vernacular discourse that they collected to create official campaign texts that associate meanings with the red chair. We have seen how the process of choosing discourse to include in official
campaign texts is marked by a number of both vocal and silenced discursive struggles because of the differing opinions and expertise of the campaign team. Different campaign members thus had different ideas of which type of discourse would be desirable or undesirable to include in the campaign and about how the red chair should be spoken for. Ultimately, the discursive struggles led to the official campaign texts omitting any references to essentialist or stereotypical discourse about gender and to omitting any direct references to Rosa Parks.

What is crucial to explaining the trajectory of the campaign and its meanings is that there was limited discussion among the campaign’s participants about which type of discourse is desirable or undesirable. There was some discussion among the campaign team, but not always (for instance, in the case of whether to include or exclude references to Rosa Parks). Moreover, there was no discussion between individual members of the campaign team and NCWIT member representatives about desirable and undesirable ways of speaking for the chair and explaining the importance of the campaign. As such, even though some members of the campaign team stated that they were “surprised to hear the words the interviewees used to describe key skills that women bring, words like ‘nurturing’ and ‘emotional’ and ‘communicators’” and those comments were ultimately edited out of the official campaign texts, the people who made those comments do not know
that they were edited out or why some of their comments were deemed problematic in the first place.

The lack of discussion between individual members of the campaign team and other campaign participants is consequential, as opportunities to meaningfully discuss, debate, and learn about how to speak about the importance of women in “computing and I.T.” are lost. Furthermore, just because certain comments deemed undesirable are edited out of official campaign texts does not mean that these comments are not repeated again in the context of the campaign when people are speaking for the red chair. Indeed, bringing “undesirable” discourse that was edited out of the official campaign texts back into the campaign constitutes the campaign’s third discursive move.

**Discursive Move #3: Enabling Edited Out Vernacular Discourse to Be Brought Back into the Campaign**

As we saw in the previous section, the campaign team selected comments from the vernacular discourse that it had collected from various NCWIT allies to create official texts that can be used to explain the campaign’s goals and that represent particular meanings of the red chair. The campaign’s second discursive move thus very much consisted of, in the words of one campaign team member, “cleaning up the comments” that were made by its various allies and removing references to stereotypical discourse about gender roles.
However, after official campaign texts were produced and made accessible to the general public, individual members of the campaign team no longer had any control over how the general public would use the texts that they had created or how they would invoke the red chair. Indeed, whereas video-recorded comments can be edited out when putting together a video montage, live comments cannot be edited by any campaign team member – especially because the campaign is simultaneously discussed in multiple places where the individual campaign team members are not present. Members of the campaign team realized this by claiming, as one told me in an interview, that “at some point, you just need to say, you know what – it’s out there. They’re going to interpret it how they’re going to interpret it.” This comment reflects very well the lack of discussion between individual members of the campaign team and NCWIT member representatives about how to interpret and talk about the campaign and the red chair. As opposed to creating a discursive space where the campaign team creates and shapes the meanings of the campaign together with NCWIT's allies, the campaign team puts the campaign out there and leaves its interpretation to various NCWIT allies. Such a practice inevitably opens room for multiple and contradictory interpretations about why the campaign is important and what the red chair signifies.

By leaving the interpretations and uses of the official campaign materials up to every individual NCWIT ally, the “Sit With Me” campaign is
using a strategy that is commonly used in commercial branding, namely enabling consumers to be active participants in the process of creating meaning (Lury, 2004). This strategy has been recognized as enabling a wider array of individuals to identify with a brand, even when they are fundamentally different from each other, because the brands have different meanings to these individuals. As such, commercial brands are open texts that allow for individual interpretations (Mumby, 2013), as is the inclusive “computing and I.T.” brand that NCWIT and the “Sit With Me” campaign are intending to construct.

How, then, are the official campaign texts used and what are some of the ways in which they are interpreted? My analysis below shows that by leaving the meanings of these materials up to all individual members and because of the lack of a discursive space where all participants in the campaign can discuss the best reasons to support women in “computing and I.T.,” the campaign team enables much of the undesirable vernacular discourse that had been either kept out or edited out of the campaign’s official texts to be brought back into the campaign.

To illustrate my above claim, I turn to a story from the 2012 NCWIT summit in Chicago. A “Sit With Me” video created by the campaign team and devoid of all stereotypical and essentialist discourse was presented to all summit attendees in a plenary session. Later in the day, after all summit attendees had seen the video, I asked several individuals what they think
about the campaign, what the red chair represents to them, and why they believe that we need a campaign to help women in “computing and I.T.”. Both in my formal and informal interviews with these individuals, many comments tended to mirror the essentialist and stereotypical comments that had been edited out of the video that they had seen. Take, for instance, the following excerpt from an interview with a summit attendee who had seen the video:

And then also women are. . . at least in my experience, I’ve noticed that women have a lot more attention to detail. . . There is a time and a place for attention and detail and a time and a place to just get the job done. . . If you have men and women on a project, you’re going to have a man on a project where you don’t need to have the attention to detail and you’re going to put the women on a project that does have the attention to detail. That’s why it would be a benefit to have both. And also different ways of looking at things. A man would not necessarily look at the graphics and say: well, that’s pretty. But a woman would.

My interviewee made the above comments when I asked her why she believed that the campaign was important or why we need more women in technology. She clearly reinforces a difference argument by implying that women bring a specific set of skills to “computing and I.T.” that men do not have: the ability to pay attention to detail. As such, this is the same type of difference argument that entails arguing that women are nurturing or better communicators and was deleted from the official campaign materials. This comment is thus a clear illustration of the campaign’s three discursive moves: after collecting vernacular discourse from various NCWIT allies about why the campaign is important and what the red chair means (discursive move
#1), the campaign team edited out stereotypical and essentialist discourse (discursive move #2), only to have it creep back into the campaign through the ways in which some individual NCWIT member representatives interpret and discuss the campaign and the red chair (discursive move #3).

As I showed in my analysis of the campaign’s second discursive move, members of the campaign team were not universal in believing that all essentialist and stereotypical discourse needed to be removed from the official texts; indeed, at least one member was hesitant to make the cuts that a social scientist concerned about essentialism and stereotypes had requested. Although ultimately essentialist and stereotypical discourse was removed from those texts, those members of the campaign team still continued to use that same discourse to interpret and discuss the campaign and the red chair. When I asked one campaign team member in an interview why she would sit in the red chair to support technical women, she stated: “I definitely want women involved because they are going to know how women multi-task just by our natural nature, so they will make software that creates that multi-tasking. Men are going to come in with their project orientation mindset.” Clearly then, just the fact that difference arguments and stereotypical discourse was cut out of the official campaign texts does not prevent either campaign team members or other NCWIT allies from using such discourse to argue for the importance of the campaign. Indeed, the creation of the official campaign texts was followed by a discursive move through which all
participants in the campaign spoke about and interpreted the campaign and the chair in their own ways, which enabled discourse that had been edited out of the campaign to reappear.

The social scientist who was the most adamant about editing out essentialist discourse from the official campaign documents noticed that as the campaign went on, many people continued to discuss and interpret the campaign in ways that she found problematic and undesirable. More than a year into the campaign, she discussed her concerns in an interview:

My biggest concern about “Sit With Me” is the kind of comments I’ve seen people sit in the red chair make: We need more women in technology because women are good at these things. And inevitably the things that they list are, you know, collaboration. The thing that concerns me the most about what they say is this idea of the gender differences. And we need more women in because of this. And because men and women have such different ways of thinking and all of that.

The excerpt I provided earlier of an NCWIT member representative stating that she believes that we need more women in “computing and I.T.” because women pay better attention to detail than men is a poignant example of the type of discourse that the social scientist finds problematic. However, the fact that this discourse remains in the campaign despite the fact that she played an important role in editing it out of the official campaign texts is not surprising given the lack of dialogue between the campaign team and NCWIT's various allies in the development of the campaign and its official discourse. For instance, while the campaign team openly invited NCWIT allies to participate by collecting discourse from them about why they support
the campaign, the allies played a very minimal role in the creation of the official texts themselves. People whose discourse was deemed problematic were never made aware that their comments were strategically edited out. Indeed, the campaign provided no discursive space for all participants in the campaign to openly engage in dialogue with each other about what the red chair represents and the problems of associating it with essentialist and stereotypical discourse about gender. As such, the very design of the “Sit With Me” campaign made it very unlikely that NCWIT allies would learn anything about the problems of using essentialist and stereotypical discourse; rather, it made it likely that allies who hold those views would continue to claim that we need more women in “computing and I.T.” because they are more “nurturing” and “emotional.” This explains why this same discourse continued to be an integral part of the campaign even though essentialist and stereotypical discourse was edited out of the official campaign materials. Put simply, the people who made those comments in the first place would continue to make them over the course of the campaign because they were never told that they were indeed problematic.

Although there was no discursive space for participants to learn about how to talk about the red chair and the campaign without resorting to essentialist and stereotypical discourse, some campaign participants who spoke on behalf of the red chair did associate the campaign and the chair with discourse that is more reflective of the official texts produced. For
instance, one NCWIT summit attendee who got her picture taken in the red chair wrote that she was sitting in the chair for the following reasons: “I believe that building computing expertise can help us build bridges to outstanding achievements and equity among all young people—and particularly girls and women—around the world.” Clearly, this story gives a much different meaning to the red chair: equity rather than essentialism. Another person who was videotaped while sitting in the red chair stated: “It's only ethically correct and imperative that women are equal partners within those groups to develop the technology of the future.” Once again, this NCWIT member representative associates the red chair with helping women in technology because it is the right thing to do, not because women are more nurturing or emotional than men. The meanings of the campaign and the red chair thus go back and forth depending upon who is speaking for it in a given time and place.

Over the course of this analysis, we have noted three distinctive discursive moves in the development of the “Sit With Me” campaign: collecting vernacular discourse form NCWIT allies, editing out that discourse to create official campaign materials, and then bringing edited out discourse back into the campaign. But why are these discursive moves consequential and what do they tell us about the ways in which the “Sit With Me” campaign rebrands “computing and I.T.” work and the actors who participate in those identity constructions? In the next and final section of this analysis chapter,
I address these questions in providing specific answers to my first research question.

**Implications of the Campaign’s Discursive Moves**

This findings chapter has sought to provide answers to my first research question: how does NCWIT's “Sit With Me” campaign rebrand “computing and I.T.” work for gender diversity and what discursive struggles are involved in this rebranding process? In this final section of the chapter, I provide succinct answers to that question based on my above analysis.

Explaining how the “Sit With Me” campaign rebranded “computing and I.T.” work for gender diversity inevitably entails looking at both the content of the campaign (e.g., what is said about “computing and I.T.” work?) and the process by which the campaign was constituted (e.g., what discursive practices contributed to the campaign’s rebranding activities?). In those regards, one of my most important findings has been to identify the central organizing element of the campaign: the red chair. Each of the three discursive moves that I identified involved discursive struggle over the meaning that the red chair should hold and how it should be “ventriloquized” or spoken for. The red chair thus became much more than a prop that was used to make the campaign visible, even though that was the principal reason why it was ultimately chosen as the emblem of the campaign. The red chair was also an actor whose meanings were contested and fragmented over the course of the campaign as participants in the campaign invoked it in
different ways. Indeed, the discursive struggles over the “Sit With Me”
campaign’s attempts to rebrand “computing and I.T.” work for gender
diversity were in fact centered around the different meanings and discourses
that people were associating with the chair. My analysis of the “Sit With Me”
campaign is thus consistent with the claims of rhetorical scholars who have
argued that contemporary public life (including campaigns such as “Sit With
Me”) is largely constituted by citizens contesting the meaning of material
artifacts and practices (Benoit-Barné, 2007; Latour, 1999). By examining the
different meanings that red chairs can have in larger societal discourses, I
have also extended the notion of presentification to refer to a material entity
that materializes and makes present not just one collective entity or
movement, but multiple collective entities and discourses.

My findings also show that “Sit With Me” was chosen as the
campaign’s concept because it was seen as being the most inclusive campaign
possible. For instance, the critiques that led to the “Re-Frame It” campaign
being nixed for “Sit With Me” were about concerns that “Re-Frame It” could
be seen as potentially offensive to both men and people of color.
Nevertheless, “Sit With Me” became a site of much stereotypical and
essentialist discourse through participants claiming that we need more
technical women because they bring qualities to the table that men do not.
The official campaign texts unsuccessfully attempted to remove such
discourse from the campaign, but it is important to consider why that
discourse was deemed so undesirable by certain members of the campaign team in the first place. For instance, the “I am not a woman” campaign was not chosen because it explicitly denied difference by saying that women and men are the same. But yet, all references to arguments that present women and men as being different were edited out of the official “Sit With Me” texts. This contradiction illuminates another discursive tension in the process of rebranding “computing and I.T.” for gender diversity: we do not want to deny difference, but we do not want to explicitly acknowledge difference either, especially because acknowledging difference arguments in official campaign texts could easily be associated with stereotypes and essentialism. To manage this discursive tension and at the request of a social scientist on the campaign team, all talk about difference was removed from the campaign’s official texts (although the categories “women” and “men” were reified and assumed to be all-encompassing). As such, the campaign does not officially recognize or deny difference.

Nevertheless, discussions about gender difference are rampant in everyday talk, especially because most people, as one of my interview participants put it, are not concerned with discourses surrounding the social construction of gender (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007; Wood, 2013). As such, it is difficult in everyday talk to convincingly argue that we need more women in “computing and I.T.” work without arguing that women are different and that they will bring some “added value” to the workforce
because they possess traits and communication styles that men do not.

However, unlike most people, the social scientists on the campaign team (and difference scholars like myself) *are* concerned about the social construction of gender and find those types of arguments to be problematic. Through their repeated requests, any arguments that presented women as bringing a distinct set of skills to “computing and I.T.” work were edited out of the official campaign texts. Regardless, editing out those arguments did not evacuate difference arguments and essentialist discourse from the campaign. Indeed, the campaign does not provide a venue where individuals can learn about how to talk about women in “computing and I.T.” without talking about difference. Moreover, the individuals who requested that difference arguments be edited out of the campaign texts were not able to talk with the individuals who made those comments about why they were edited out. Difference arguments and essentialist discourse are thus removed from the official campaign texts, but not from the ways in which the campaign and its symbolic red chair are invoked in everyday discourse.

The absence of any discussion of difference in official campaign texts can be seen as a key rhetorical strategy. Indeed, because arguments about gender differences are typically easier for the general public to buy into, discussing gender differences in the context of the campaign inevitably enables it to have resonance with more people. However, the campaign cannot explicitly endorse these arguments because they go against social
science research and run the important risk of reifying stereotypes about women being nurturing and, in the process, undermining their technical competence. Managing this tension by neglecting to provide a space where all participants in the campaign can learn about how to talk about the campaign without reifying gender differences thus enables essentialist discourse that was edited out of the official texts to come back into the campaign when individual NCWIT member representatives speak on behalf of the red chair and the campaign. In this sense, essentialist discourse that may resonate more with the general public remains in the campaign, but NCWIT and the campaign team cannot be held accountable for it because they didn’t explicitly endorse that discourse. The campaign team is thus able to have the campaign resonate with a larger public audience and avoid critiques that it is reproducing stereotypical discourse through the rhetorical strategy of getting other people (e.g., NCWIT member representatives) to say what an individual or group (e.g., the campaign team) does not want to say or cannot explicitly say without risking being critiqued. More specifically though, some members of the campaign team (e.g., the social scientists) let some NCWIT member representatives say what they do not want the official texts to say. Indeed, some people on the campaign team readily used stereotypical and essentialist discourse to discuss the campaign, just as some NCWIT member representatives did not.
In this first analysis chapter, we have seen that through three distinct discursive moves, essentialist discourse is able to be expressed in the campaign even though it is not explicitly endorsed or included in official “Sit With Me” texts. However, what form do these essentialist arguments take? What are the multiple and contradictory ways in which gender and other forms of difference are constructed in the context of the campaign? How can we imagine constructing difference differently in the context of the campaign? And how can the campaign’s discursive moves be reimagined so as to prevent (1) problematic essentialist discourse from being expressed in the context of the campaign and (2) the categories of “women” and “men” from being reified and treated as all-encompassing? I address these questions not only in my concluding chapter (Chapter 7), but also in my subsequent analysis chapter (Chapter 6), which adopts a queer lens to analyze the consequences of the “Sit With Me” campaign’s discourse for both difference and occupational (de)segregation.
A PARADOX OF INCLUSIVITY: CONSTRUCTIONS OF DIFFERENCE IN THE “SIT WITH ME” CAMPAIGN

In the previous findings chapter, I outlined how the question of difference was effectively kept out of official “Sit With Me” campaign texts: difference was neither explicitly denied or acknowledged in any form. Nevertheless, many NCWIT member representatives and staff members (including members of the campaign team) frequently invoked difference when they discussed the significance of the campaign and the red chair with others. When difference was invoked, it was often discussed in essentialist ways by claiming natural and enduring differences between women and men and citing these differences as reasons why we need to increase the representation of women in “computing and I.T.” – a far cry from the campaign’s official texts that do not explicitly refer to any specific gender differences.

We have yet to examine the multiple and contradictory ways in which gender and other forms of difference are constructed in the context of the campaign. In addition, we have not yet examined the consequences of the campaign’s constructions of difference on the campaign’s ultimate goal: desegregating “computing and I.T.” work by rebranding it as an inclusive line of work, especially for women. This second findings chapter explores the issues mentioned above by providing answers to my second and final research
question: what are the consequences of the discourse surrounding the “Sit With Me” campaign for relations of difference and the campaign’s goal of occupational desegregation?

To provide answers to this research question, I first engage in a detailed analysis of the ways in which multiple forms of difference are constructed in the context of the campaign and how these constructions frame the relationship between discourse, difference, and organization. Afterwards, I expose a paradox of inclusivity that is a prominent feature of the “Sit With Me” campaign, which leads me to challenging current approaches to occupational inclusivity through rebranding.

The Campaign’s Treatment of Difference

As we saw in Chapter 2, “difference” is a very broad construct. Allen (2011) conceptualizes difference as referring to the ways in which individuals are similar to and different from each other, with these similarities and differences being placed on a continuum. That is, individuals are never completely different from nor completely the same as other individuals. Allen (2011) is especially concerned with analyzing difference through the lens of various social identities that individuals embody and perform in everyday interactions – identities such as gender, race, sexuality, ability, class, and age. Other social identities that are important forms of difference include native language, religion, and nationality (Anzaldúa, 2007; Banerjee, 2006; Freaeke et al., 2011; Valenti, 2004; Wells, 2013; Wells & Gill, 2012).
As feminist scholars have been convincingly arguing for decades, not all differences are created equally; some differences are valued and privileged whereas others are devalued and marginalized. For instance, the theories of the glass ceiling, the glass escalator, the glass cliff, and the glass slipper postulate that white masculinity tends to be privileged in contemporary organizational contexts and that embodying and performing white masculinity leads individuals to achieving greater success in occupations that are deemed professional and highly valued (K. L. Ashcraft, 2013; Buzzanell, 1995; Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007; Williams, 1992, 1995).

Drawing from this tradition of research, I focus my subsequent analysis on illustrating how forms of difference along the lines of gender, race, sexuality, ability, language, class, and occupational alignment are the subject of discursive struggle in the discourse surrounding the “Sit With Me” campaign. As discussed in Chapter 4, the use of these identity categories is a source of tension for me, as the queer approach to difference that I advocate postulates that categorical thinking is problematic. However, in order to fully demonstrate how and why categorical thinking is indeed problematic, I conduct an intersectional analysis, which enables me to point out contradictions and paradoxes that arise when designing an occupational rebranding campaign through this perspective. I analyze these categories of difference rather than others because these are among the most widely cited categories in attempts to conduct intersectional analyses and because my
data shows that these forms of difference can be seen as socially significant in
the context of the “Sit With Me” campaign. However, I do not claim that
these are the only forms of difference that matter, nor that we can make any
generalizations about the experiences of individuals on the basis of their
identification with any of the identity categories that I list. Rather,
conducting my analysis in this way enables me to expose the limits of
categorical thinking in occupational rebranding campaigns and to
subsequently propose an alternative queer framework for the practice of
occupational rebranding.

Framing the Relationship Between Difference, Discourse, and Organization

As I illustrated in Chapter 5, official “Sit With Me” campaign texts do
not explicitly address difference in any way, other than invoking the
categories “women” and “men” and stating that the campaign is purported to
increase the representation of “women” in “computing and I.T.” work.
However, even though the official texts don’t address difference, most
campaign participants do. In this section, I thus examine how the
campaign’s unofficial discourse framed the relationship between difference,
discourse, and organization, as well as how certain forms of difference are
(in)visible and (un)addressed in the campaign’s discourse.

Frame 1: Difference Organizes Discourse

The majority of the campaign’s discourse about difference
incontestably fits within the frame of difference organizing discourse. As
such, when the campaign participants tended to talk about difference and associate the red chair with meanings about difference, they tended to talk exclusively about gender, assume that gender is a relatively stable construct that is closely aligned with sex, and establish a relationship between gender and the ways in which individuals communicate. Discourse framing the relationship between difference, discourse, and organization in this way generally took the following abstract form: women are different because of x and y, therefore we need more women in “computing and I.T.”. Indeed, one story that a campaign participant uploaded to the “Sit With Me” website explicitly states that “women see from different perspectives than men,” thereby firmly supporting the idea that difference (or, more specifically, gender) influences discourse.

There are dozens of examples that I could cite from my data to show how much of the “Sit With Me” campaign’s unofficial discourse is based on the assumption that gender organizes discourse. This is in large part because much of the campaign’s discourse equates “gender” with “sex” when these concepts, although intertwined, are very different from each other. As we saw in Chapter 2, sex refers to “the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 127) whereas gender “is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 127). As
such, sex refers to individuals as women or men, whereas gender refers to how individuals negotiate their identity in light of the cultural meanings that are ascribed to their categorization as either women or men. There is no direct link between sex and gender, as the ascription of a particular individual as a “woman” does not imply that this individual will negotiate her identity in a way that would be seen as “feminine.” Many women perform gender in ways that is culturally associated as more “masculine,” just as many men perform gender in ways that is culturally coded as more “feminine,” a process that has been conceptualized as undoing gender (C. Connell, 2010; Deutsch, 2007; J. McDonald, 2013b; Risman, 2009).

Despite the important differences between the concepts of “sex” and “gender,” much discourse surrounding the “Sit With Me” campaign tends to blur these two concepts by implying that sex equates to gender and that because of one’s ascription as a “woman,” they perform their gender in a way that is incontestably seen as “feminine.” For instance, one man who sat in the red chair at one of the Pacesetters meetings stated that we need more women in “computing and I.T.” work because women, on the basis of their sex, will create different types of technological products than men. More specifically, he stated that when men create products, they are black, gray, make noise, and blow up. Women, on the other hand, create products that are brilliant and full of bright colors. After he finished his story, there was an opportunity for the other Pacesetters in the audience to give feedback.
Interestingly, the feedback to this story was very positive and no one openly questioned this participant’s equation of sex and gender and the essentialism that stems from equating those two concepts. Another male Pacesetter did ask the person in the chair what he would say to people who say that some boys like color and that some girls like to blow things up. However, he posed this question in somewhat of a sarcastic tone – as if he was rolling his eyes. In this sense, it seemed like he knows that others will find this discourse either problematic or politically incorrect even though he does not. The person in the chair responded by stating “that’s why I use the word generally.” Clearly then, this participant in the campaign believes that gender organizes discourse and frames gender in this way when he talks about the campaign and the red chair. I mention gender specifically since he didn’t make reference to race or other forms of difference; therefore, we don’t know whether he believes that other forms of difference also organize discourse.

Although any comments that explicitly stated that women and men are different from each other were edited out of the official campaign texts, many comments assuming that gender organizes discourse can be found in the video footage from which these texts were made. For instance, in the first cut of a “Sit With Me” video, the marketing team who had created the video included comments of a man stating that “women have a tendency of having a better connection with people and can bring in the emotional quotient to
the design of technology.” He then went on to say that another generation of products can be made with this emotional aspect if more women are designing I.T. This campaign participant thus argues that we need more women in “computing and I.T.” because women, being fundamentally different than men, will design technology that appeals to people’s emotions more than technology that men make. Another participant in the same video stated that women are “good at communications,” whereas a third participant stated that women are “able to really nurture and promote teamwork.” These comments all fit within Ashcraft and Mumby’s (2004b) first frame: the idea that gender organizes discourse.

My interview data also show that many participants in the campaign view gender as organizing discourse and thus assume that women will create different technological products than men. Even a prominent campaign team member stated that “I really do want technology to have women’s ideas manifested in them. That’s very important to me.” This comment assumes that women will come up with different ideas than men simply because they are women. A participant from an NCWIT-affiliated organization went so far as to present fundamental differences between women and men as the reason why more women are needed in “computing and I.T.,” as is illustrated when she states that “I think what we’re saying now is that it’s not about fairness, it’s more about creating the best product. And women and men approach problems differently, solve problems differently, and think creatively.”
order to support this view of gender organizing discourse, another participant gave a specific example:

The first airbags would crush women and children because the guys weren’t thinking about women and children when they were designing airbags. Voice understanding systems didn’t hear women at all. But the guys who designed them designed them for them. So there, at the table, we get left out. When I worked at General Motors research labs, how many cup holders does a car need, but there is no place for a woman’s purse?

This participant thus cites both social and biological differences between women and men to show that more women are needed in “computing and I.T.”.

We have seen that many participants believe that women will create different technological products than men because of their different subject positions. The following comment that a campaign participant told me in the interview sums up much of the discourse that supports this view: “I think men and women bring different things to the table, certainly.” However, all of the comments that I have showcased in this section beg the question: what about other forms of difference? Is it just gender that organizes discourse, or is it other forms of difference as well?

As I will discuss later in this chapter, other forms of difference tended to be (in)visible in the campaign. However, some participants framed difference more broadly in order to claim that all forms of difference – not just gender – organize discourse. In particular, one participant from an NCWIT-affiliated organization stated in an interview that:
The reason that women are so important is that half of the world is women. Not only that, but women make up most of the computing technology purchases. . . So it’s not just having the perspective of half the planet, but it’s being able to develop products and innovate for customer need of those who have the purchasing power. There’s also older generations, new generations coming into the workforce, people with disabilities, it is different races, ethnicities, backgrounds, cultures. Really, you have to have all of those perspectives if you want to continue to meet the needs of the global consumer base. . . We have to get a representative perspective, meaning you look like your customer so that you understand them. You know what do they want, what do they like, what they are interested in.

As such, this participant believes that all forms of difference give people different perspectives, which will in turn lead these people to communicating differently and to having different technological needs. In other words, she believes that difference organizes discourse, not just gender.

Although the vast majority of the campaign’s discourse is based on the assumption that difference (especially gender) organizes discourse, there are other ways in which the discourse-difference-organization relationship is framed. I’ll thus now show how some of the campaign discourse is aligned with the assumption that it is discourse that organizes difference.

**Frame 2: Discourse Organizes Difference**

As discussed in Chapter 2, to claim that discourse organizes difference is to treat the concepts of sex and gender differently. From this point of view, discourse isn’t determined by any form of difference such as gender; instead, discourse constructs (or organizes) difference.

One participant from an NCWIT-affiliated organization told a story in the red chair that fits clearly into this second frame. She states that the
difficulties of women in “computing and I.T.” are related to gender performances, not sex, and that women should construct their gender identities in a more masculine way in order to succeed in this male-dominated field. This point of view was supported by several other campaign participants. For instance, several other participants wrote in their “Sit With Me” stories that the biggest challenges of being a woman in I.T. is “maintaining a feminine style of leadership and still having a voice heard at the table” and “balancing the fine line between assertiveness and being perceived as ‘bitchy.’” Many participants in the campaign thus recognize that performing gender in a more culturally feminine way in the field of “computing and I.T.” can pose challenges to an individual’s success in this field.

Because these comments frame the problem of women in “computing and I.T.” as related to their gender performances, the solution is viewed by several participants is having women engage in more masculine gender performances. One particularly poignant example of this way of framing the difficulties of women in this field stems from a Pacesetters meeting, where a participant in the campaign sat in the red chair to discuss her support for and her participation in what she calls a “command presence workshop.” As she put it, the goal of the workshop is to help “mid-level technical women be successful when presenting in decision-making meetings, in task forces, and to executive level audiences.” The workshop that she advocates thus assumes
that communication constructs gender identities; as such, women are not
destined to communicate in particular ways and they can change their
communication styles in order to serve them well.

The command presence workshops described above are controversial
because they seek to show women how to do masculinity by elevating their
voices and standing over people, thereby reinstating the status quo by simply
encouraging women to change the way that they perform gender and leaving
dominant masculine performances unchallenged. However, other campaign
discourse frames discourse as organizing gender in less controversial ways.
For instance, one campaign participant stated that women “don’t have to take
an art degree just because that’s what girls do. If they really like building
robots, then dammit, go build a robot!” Another campaign participant also
posted the following story to the “Sit With Me” website:

In high school there is a lot of pressure on young women to focus on
superficial things and pursue more "girly" career interests like PR. It’s
easy to feel like you need to give in to this pressure in order to feel
feminine, empowered, or successful. However, if you are interested in
technology, I beg you to stick with it! Tech fields are changing the
world, and there is a need for smart, awesome women. Do what you
love!

A man who was videotaped telling a “Sit With Me” story echoed these
comments, stating that his daughter has received messages about what boys
are expected to do and what girls are expected to do – but that he tells his
daughter that she can do anything that she likes. All of these comments thus
deny any direct link between female bodies and particular interests or gender
performances and assume that discourse organizes difference rather than the opposite.

One last example of how the campaign’s discourse frames discourse as organizing difference stems from my interview with an NCWIT staff member and “Sit With Me” campaign team member. She stated that because neither NCWIT nor “Sit With Me” wants to reinforce stereotypes about women and femininity, they strive to present their work in gender-neutral ways. As such, NCWIT materials avoid the color pink and feminine fonts so that they can be interpreted as unisex. Another NCWIT staff member concurred, stating that she would have never agreed with the idea of a pink chair for the “Sit With Me” campaign because that would reinforce stereotypes about women and present women as being fundamentally different from men. Sticking to gender-neutral colors and fonts is thus one way in which the campaign constructs relations of difference through discourse.

As I mentioned previously, there are many more examples in my data set about how difference is framed as organizing discourse rather than the opposite. However, although much of the campaign’s discourse assumes important differences between women and men, we have seen here that some campaign participants view individuals as constructing their own gender identities in their everyday discourse. In addition, and as I show in the next two sections, unofficial campaign discourse also frames organizations and occupations as producing discourse that privileges some differences over
others (frame 3), as well as discourse constituting organizations and occupations that inherently privilege certain forms of difference.

**Frame 3: Organizations and Occupations Produce Discourse That Privileges Certain Forms of Difference**

A number of participants in the “Sit With Me” campaign suggested that the very structure of societal institutions work to privilege and/or disadvantage certain forms of difference. Indeed, some prominent members of the campaign team and NCWIT staff members implied that NCWIT’s very mission seeks to change organizational structures that are biased towards women. For instance, one stated in an interview that “we do say that it’s not about fixing the women, it’s about fixing the system.” There is thus recognition that contemporary organizations are gendered in that they presume an abstract male worker, which disadvantages women (Acker, 1990). Another participant elaborated by stating that NCWIT’s work, and by extension the “Sit With Me” campaign, is fundamentally about organizational reform. She goes on to state:

I mean that’s the purpose of the organization. Not to better the lives of individual women. There are other organizations that do that. And so, through organizational reform, you make it a, you know, a friendlier place for all different kinds of people, not just for one kind of people.

This comment is very consistent with conversations at some of the first “Sit With Me” campaign team meetings in which all members of the campaign team agreed to making organizations – and not women – the campaign’s primary target audience. The logic behind having organizations as the target
audience is that if NCWIT wants to make technical workplaces better for women, it needs to reach out to the upper administration personnel that have the power to implement organizational reforms that can improve the situation of many people, including women.

Although one of the campaign team members stated, as we saw above, that NCWIT is working for organizational reform that will benefit “all different kinds of people” (e.g., not just women), the vast majority of the campaign discourse framing organizations as inherently privileging certain forms of difference over others centered around gender biases in the workplace. For instance, one campaign team member stated in an interview that many male administrators “don’t know that their performance appraisals are using feminine words for women and masculine words for men. They don’t know that. But when they do know it, one person said: oh my gosh, I’m going back to read my forms!” Thus, when she discusses the campaign with others, she emphasizes that the problem of inclusivity in technology organizations is related to organizational forms and practices that systematically privilege women over men – and that the problem of inclusivity can therefore be solved by changing these organizational forms and practices.

Several NCWIT member representatives emphasized the gendered nature of organizations when they were discussing the campaign and sitting in the red chair. For instance, one member noted that she’s noticed that
when women and minorities are in the candidate pool for a job in her organization, they are held to a different standard and need to have a more impressive résumé than men in order to be considered. Another NCWIT member representative echoed those comments, suggesting that women tend to be promoted based on what they have done and demonstrated, whereas men tend to be promoted based solely on the potential that they will succeed. He deplored these practices as “totally unfair” and as emanating from micro, unconscious biases.

In sum, although official campaign texts do not explicitly address difference or, by extension, the gendered nature of organizations, many campaign participants invoke biased organizational forms and practices when discussing the difficulties of women in “computing and I.T.” work, as well as how to make this line of work more inclusive. Organizations themselves – not women’s nature (frame 1) or gender performances (frame 2) – are thus seen as constructing both difference and inequalities related to difference in “computing and I.T.” work. Moreover, below I explore how the campaign’s unofficial discourse sees public discourse as ultimately being the culprit of women’s difficulties in “computing and I.T.”.

Frame 4: Discourse Constitutes Organizations and Occupations That Inherently Privilege Certain Forms of Difference

The “Sit With Me” campaign can be seen as a form of public discourse about difference in “computing and I.T.”. However, whereas the “Sit With
Me” campaign’s explicit aim is to shape public discourse in ways that render the field of “computing and I.T.” more inclusive, much public discourse about this field presents it as a man’s domain. Such discourse is ultimately deplored by a number of participants in the “Sit With Me” campaign who consider that public discourse constitutes the occupation of “computing and I.T.” in ways that make it seem more natural for men for pursue a career in this field than women.

In line with viewing public discourse as constituting “computing and I.T.” in ways that privilege men in this field (frame 4), one participant explicitly states in a story that she published on the “Sit With Me” website that she supports the campaign for the following reason: “I want to see more women in control of their own destinies, because girls are hungry for truth about their options, not media stereotypes.” Another campaign participant concurs, by stating in an interview that “there’s a whole bunch of negative connotations and stereotypes that have been fostered in the community through the media or, you know, these depictions of what a geek is or what a nerd is that we have to overcome.” Media stereotypes, which come from cultural texts such as films, television shows, and magazines, are thus pinpointed as an important cause of women’s underrepresentation in “computing and I.T.” by these two campaign participants. One participant noted that stereotypes about “computing and I.T.” being a male domain are even ingrained into the name of popular technology products: “Game Boys.
My daughters were like: why isn’t there a Game Girl?” In this sense, public discourse presenting technology as a man’s domain is deeply ingrained into society, influencing even the name of technological products that are produced. Consequently, public discourse is seen as contributing to the constitution of the occupation of “computing and I.T.” in a way that privileges men, while disadvantaging women.

Because public discourse presenting technology as a man’s domain is so rampant in everyday life, several participants in the “Sit With Me” campaign argue that women are socialized away from “computing and I.T.” work. One participant in particular elaborated on the power of societal discourses about the field in an interview:

Society I think, it’s kind of like different sides of the same coin. Society is saying that this is what men do and this is what women do, basically. And you know, women don’t do these hard things. (laughter). Whatever that means. And men don’t do these caring things, which. Crazy. It’s insane. And then we raise our children that way. So that the men who are nurturing and caring somehow feel unmanly. You know. And the ones, the women who go into these tech fields feel that they have to be unfeminine. Crazy.

Because this participant in the “Sit With Me” campaign views societal discourses as being at the heart of women’s underrepresentation in “computing and I.T.” and the difficulties that many women face in this field, she ultimately advocates changing these discourses so that they become more inclusive of women. Another campaign participant is doing just that, most notably by prominently placing pictures of girls and women on pamphlets advertising computing summer camps that she runs:
One of the things that I do here is that we run computing summer camps. . . In May, they put pictures of things on the flyer. Robots and whatever, and research on girls shows that they prefer to see pictures of people. I don’t want to see pictures of robots, I want to see pictures of people playing with the robot. Pictures of people like me. It’s actually kind of funny because on our website one year, I put a lot of pictures of females doing things and I actually got a call from a parent saying: do boys like this too? (laugh)

Several participants in the “Sit With Me” campaign thus frame public discourse about “computing and I.T.” work as contributing to women’s underrepresentation in this field and set out to change public discourse to make it more inclusive. Certainly, the “Sit With Me” campaign itself is contributing to shifting public discourse about the field by rebranding it as not only inclusive of women, but an exceptional career for women.

Although we have seen that difference is framed in four distinct ways in the “Sit With Me” campaign’s unofficial discourse, my analysis also shows that difference tends to be equated with gender. Moreover, gender is often equated with sex in the campaign’s unofficial discourse, the majority of which frames gender as organizing discourse and women as thus having different communication styles, interests, and talents than men. However, the categories of “women” and “men” are not all encompassing. An intersectional analysis thus leads me to examining how other forms of difference, particularly race, sexuality, ability status, language, class, and occupational alignment, are relevant to the “Sit With Me” campaign in some way. In the next section of this chapter, I examine how these forms of difference matter in the context of the campaign.
Considering Difference Beyond “Women” and “Men”

During the two years that I spent shadowing the “Sit With Me” campaign and other NCWIT activities, there was little consideration of difference outside of the categories “women” and “men”. In many respects, NCWIT can’t be blamed for that, since the literature on difference in “computing and I.T.” tends to focus exclusively upon those categories without troubling (or queering) them in any way and considering socially significant differences that are masked by them. Consequently, many forms of difference remained largely invisible in the campaign.

Several prominent social scientists affiliated with NCWIT often critique the overemphasis upon the categories “women” and “men” in the research literature. For instance, at the 2011 Social Science Advisory Board meeting, all attendees – including myself – were asked to read Misa’s (2010c) anthology Gender Codes prior to arriving at the meeting. During an informal conversation, one of the attendees expressed frustration at how the entire book only had one reference to another form of difference other than gender. She found it particularly problematic that all of the pictures in the book were of white people, but that whiteness was never interrogated as a topic. She told me that she knew that she wasn’t going to be the only one on the board to raise that topic – and indeed she wasn’t. Clearly, this shows that many prominent people working with NCWIT are aware that the research
literature on difference in “computing and I.T.” tends to overemphasize gender and underemphasize other important forms of difference.

Another social scientist also let me know that she thinks that things are changing, both in the research literature and in NCWIT’s work. In fact, she made an analogy to the feminist movement, which she stated was first discussing women without considering other forms of difference but then evolved to recognize differences among women. The days of NCWIT’s work and the research literature on difference in “computing and I.T.” equating difference with gender/sex without considering other intersections of difference could thus very well be numbered.

Nevertheless, “women” and “men” are not the only forms of difference that matter in the “Sit With Me” campaign. In the following sections of this chapter, I explore how race, sexuality, ability status, language, class, and occupational alignment are all relevant to the campaign, but how treating each of these differences as fixed categories, as intersectional analyses tend to do, creates tensions and paradoxes.

**Race**

Race is one of the forms of difference that is the most commonly considered in intersectional studies and is incontestably relevant in the context of the “Sit With Me” campaign. Indeed, I noticed in one of the campaign team’s first meetings that race was largely invisible and left unproblematized. The purpose of this meeting was to think about how to
develop the “Sit With Me” campaign idea that the Pacesetters had chosen for the backdrop of their national advocacy campaign. Representatives from the social marketing firm that NCWIT had hired to develop and market the campaign led this call and had prepared PowerPoint slides to present their ideas to the campaign team. As we were going through the slides, I was intrigued by two personae of technical women that were presented: Liz and Kaitlin. These two personae were intended to represent two of the key “target audiences” of the Sit With Me campaign: mid-career women who are already in the field of “computing and technology” and pre-career women who are majoring in computer science or considering majoring in the field.

Let’s first turn to Liz, a fictional mid-career woman who is represented in a white body and who is a 38 year old network engineer with two sons. The document states that in her limited spare time, she likes to knit, catch up on *Wired* magazine, read gadget reviews, and spend time with her kids. Furthermore, the document states that Liz feeling overwhelmed by her work and her home life, especially because she has recently started to take MBA courses. The second persona is Kaitlin, who, like Liz, is presented in a white body. She’s a 19 year old fictional college student in New Hampshire who decided to major in math because she was inspired by her (female) high school calculus teacher and subsequently took a computer programming course. Kaitlin’s persona states that she was the only girl in the class and that she didn’t feel as though she made any connections or friends.
Liz and Kaitlin were both depicted in white bodies without problematizing race in any way. Because Liz and Kaitlin were intended to represent the abstract target audience, it became clear to me that abstract technical women were being thought of as white by prominent members of the campaign team. Whiteness was thus the invisible norm in these campaign planning documents: abstract women were imagined as white women (Grimes, 2002). From a social justice perspective, this can be seen as problematic because whereas the campaign team is challenging exclusionary occupational discourses on the basis of gender, exclusionary occupational discourses on the basis of race are not addressed – despite that people of color are even more excluded from these discourses than women (C. Ashcraft & Blithe, 2009; Margolis et al., 2008; Margolis & Fisher, 2002). This shows how white privilege can be left uninterrogated even when a group of well-intentioned actors attempt to disrupt male privilege. In this case, white privilege is maintained not through any direct discourse about race, but by not problematizing race and keeping it invisible (McIntosh, 2004).

Even though race was largely invisible in dominant discourses surrounding the campaign, some individual campaign participants did explicitly refer to it at times. For instance, in a story published on the campaign website, one participant wrote that she is proud to be a woman in I.T. because “there aren’t many women of color in the field and I like being a living example that it can be done.” As such, this participant troubles
normative occupational discourses about who can work in “computing and I.T.,” as she states that she is living proof that women of color are able to pursue a career in this field. However, she is one of the only participants who mentioned race in her story about why she sat in the red chair to support the “Sit With Me” campaign. Thus, race was largely unproblematicized in both official and unofficial campaign discourse.

One other instance where race was made visible in the context of the “Sit With Me” campaign takes us to the 2012 NCWIT summit in Chicago. During a plenary session at the summit where the “Sit With Me” campaign was discussed, the presenter didn’t make any explicit references to race and exclusively focused on gender as a form of difference. However, a woman of color posed the first question in this session, first telling the audience that the state of women of color in “computing and I.T.” is “embarrassing” and subsequently asking what NCWIT and/or the campaign was doing to address that situation. The NCWIT staff member who fielded the question responded by stating that NCWIT focuses on all women and asking her to “stay tuned” for programs that may address race more explicitly in the future. This is another instance where we see race as being a subject of discursive struggle and highly relevant in the campaign.

In sum, race is generally left unproblematicized in general discourses surrounding the campaign and it surfaces only in localized instances. By unproblematizing race as a socially significant form of difference, the ideology
of whiteness, through which abstract workers in “computing and I.T.” are presumed to be white, is silently reified in the campaign.

**Sexuality**

Sexuality is another form of difference that is relevant in the context of the campaign, even though it was largely unaddressed in both in the campaign’s official texts and unofficial discourse. Not even one of the stories submitted by NCWIT member representatives to be posted on the website made references to sexuality as a form of difference. The only explicit consideration of sexuality as a form of difference that I noted in my two year ethnography of the “Sit With Me” campaign was in a speech by a technical women at a plenary dinner at the NCWIT 2011 summit, which is when the campaign was first presented to NCWIT member representatives at large. She stated that it isn’t just women who would benefit by having more women in technology: gay men would benefit as well. She drew from a conversation that she had with a gay man who had told her that he likes it when there are women in the room because he feels that he can ask more questions about his work to his colleagues when there are more women in the room.

The above presentation is the only time that sexuality as a form of difference was explicitly made visible in the campaign’s discourse. Because we live in a heteronormative society in which one is presumed to be straight unless they disclose otherwise (Adams, 2011; DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007), keeping sexuality hidden as a form of difference in the rest of the
campaign’s discourse silently reifies heterosexuality as a dominant, invisible norm. However, heteronormativity is more than about heterosexuality; it’s an entire configuration of everyday practices and lifestyles in which individuals are expected to be married (to someone of the opposite sex) and have children – children for whom women will be the primary care providers, even when both parents work (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007).

Heteronormativity is thus not only reinforced by keeping various sexual identities and preferences invisible, but also through comments about family care and responsibilities. For instance, several participants argued that “computing and I.T.” is especially good for women because, as one person wrote in a story on the “Sit With Me” website, it is “family friendly.” One participant elaborated on this argument in an interview with me:

So you know, it is an excellent job for women. I worked part-time after I had kids for years. Because more childcare falls on women than on men in our culture, women that work part-time are happiest. You know because full-time women who have children, it’s too stressful. People who work part time are the happiest and computer science is an excellent job for that. You can work from home, you can work anywhere there is a computer. So this is a great job for women.

These arguments, which are quite prominent in the campaign’s unofficial discourse, reinforce heteronormativity by assuming that women are responsible for childcare, that consequently they should only work part-time, and that because women can work part-time from home in “computing and I.T.,” it’s a great job for women. Although these arguments may be appealing to certain women, they may insult other individuals who either don’t have or
want children, have a partner who will be primarily responsible for childcare, and/or are more career-driven than family-driven. In these instances, the campaign’s discourse is reinforcing heteronormativity rather than busting gender narratives or considering how many women and men do not conform to heternormative standards. Moreover, by keeping sexuality and heteronormativity unproblematic and invisible in the context of the campaign, heterosexuality and heteronormativity are also silently reinforced as the norm.

### Ability Status

Although disability is a form of difference that has largely been neglected in much organizational communication research, ability status is a form of difference that incontestably matters in organizational life. Bodies that are deemed non-normative are often seen as being inapt to do particular types of work and sometimes inapt to do any work at all; as such, they fall out of normative discourses about who should be exercising what types of work (Allen, 2011).

However, when ability status was made visible in the context of the “Sit With Me” campaign, it was largely addressed in instrumental terms rather than in ways that challenge normative discourses that present abstract workers as able-bodied and individuals with physical disabilities as being unfit to work. By addressing ability status in instrumental terms, I mean that discourse about disability was generally limited to making the
official campaign texts accessible to people with disabilities whenever convenient or possible. For instance, one major international company that had videotaped hundreds of people sitting in the red chair expressing their support for women in “computing and I.T.” told the campaign team that their videos were going to be captioned, which one campaign team member said was great “because then it’s also accessible for people with disabilities.” Ability status is thus made visible, but discourses associating abstract technology workers with able-bodiedness remain largely unchallenged.

Even though ability status was largely invisible unless a particular individual (like the woman described above) problematized it or asked a specific question about this, a close analysis of the “Sit With Me” campaign’s discourse reveals how the campaign’s participants were silently assumed to be able-bodied through what I call ableist discourse; that is, discourse that assumes able-bodiedness as a universal characteristic of all individuals. Take, for instance, the video that is portrayed on the campaign’s homepage, where an NCWIT member representative states that participating in the campaign is “just easy” because anyone can sit in the chair. Similarly, a prominent member of the campaign team suggested to other campaign team members that when people ask us about the campaign at the 2012 summit, we should convey three central points: we emphasize symbolic action, we value technical women, and anyone can sit in the chair. Certainly, for able-bodied people, sitting in the chair may be easy, but not everyone can
physically sit in the chair. Indeed, sitting in the chair may be difficult for people with certain types of physical disabilities, who may need help to sit in it or who may not even be able to sit in it at all. The emblem of a campaign that is meant to be inclusive of everyone is thus not accessible to individuals with many physical disabilities, thereby silently casting their bodies as non-normative. In fact, to even state that anyone can sit in the chair demonstrates a lack of reflexivity of ability status as a form of difference among prominent participants in the “Sit With Me” campaign, which further shows how ability status is largely a silenced, (in)visible form of difference in the campaign.

However, ability status may become more visible as the campaign evolves. For instance, one member of the campaign team suggested that in order to be inclusive of people with disabilities, the campaign team should work towards getting a red wheelchair. In an interview, she told me: “And one of my goals is to get a red wheelchair story. I really want something, or a crutch or something.” Showcasing pictures of people with disabilities sitting in a red wheelchair rather than in the red chair does have the potential to help change normative occupational discourses that tend to present all workers, including those in “computing and I.T.” as able-bodied. Furthermore, even considering the necessity of a red wheelchair shows that at least one member of the campaign team is cognizant of the need to disrupt normative discourses around work and disability. Nevertheless, ability
status, as a form of difference, has largely been seen as a purely instrumental concern to date and some of the campaign’s discourse, such as the idea that sitting in the red chair is just easy, reinforces the ideology of able-bodiedness. Consequently, the abstract technical woman in the context of the campaign has largely been conceptualized as being able-bodied and as being able to easily get oneself into the red chair.

Language

Although language has very rarely been considered to be a socially significant difference in the organizational communication literature (for an exception, see Pelletier & Bencherki, 2010), it is an important form of difference at work. Although English is recognized as the de facto dominant language of business and of social interaction in the United States, there are an increasing number of native Spanish speakers. As a result of the country’s changing demographics, U.S. organizations have increasingly been catering to their Spanish-speaking clientele by creating advertisements in Spanish and by providing Spanish language services to their customers.

Although I didn’t think of this until when I was writing this analysis – perhaps reflecting my own privilege as a fluent speaker of English – today, I find it striking that language was such an invisible form of difference in discussions about the “Sit With Me” campaign. Although many organizations offer services and advertise in Spanish, none of the official “Sit With Me” texts were translated into Spanish or any other language, nor was there any
discussion as to whether the texts should be translated into another language. Whereas English cannot be seen as the “official” language of the campaign because language as a form of difference was never discussed, it silently and invisibly became the default language of the campaign in which all discourse surrounding the campaign would be expressed. Language, as a form of difference, was thus largely unaddressed.

The fact that language was unaddressed in the campaign’s discourse is surprising considering the global turn that the campaign took. The campaign team played an important role in making “Sit With Me” go global, as it was actively soliciting stories from outside of the United States. In that sense, it has succeeded: there are now “Sit With Me” stories showcased on the campaign website from the United Arab Emirates, Brazil, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Germany, Australia, and Mauritius. An analysis of the international hits that the “Sit With Me” campaign website received has also shown that a number of people from Russia have visited the site. Whereas English is the dominant language in Australia and the United Kingdom, English is not the dominant language spoken in Belgium, Brazil, France, Germany, Mauritius, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates. Thus, in order for individuals from these countries to participate in the campaign, they had to read the campaign’s documents and watch the campaign’s videos in the English language.
Language briefly became visible as a form of difference when a major multinational company was preparing to host “Sit With Me” events around the world. When the organizer of these international events asked if it would be acceptable to have “Sit With Me” stories in foreign languages placed on the website, a prominent member of the campaign team sent an e-mail to one of the organizers of these events to tell her that “it’s okay to use a foreign language in submitting a story as long as it’s translated right after.” This was the only time that language was problematized during the campaign and no stories in languages other than English have been posted to the website to date. As such, language was largely considered to be an unimportant form of difference in the discourse surrounding the campaign. Keeping language uninterrogated and invisible in the campaign’s discourse serves to silently normalize English as the dominant language not only of the campaign, but of “computing and I.T.” workers in the United States and around the world.

Class

Not everyone in the U.S. has equal access to technology. A wealth of research on the “digital divide” demonstrates that less affluent communities, which are often racially diverse, do not have the same opportunities to use and develop technology (Norris, 2001). This can be linked to two general phenomena: schools in less affluent communities have fewer resources to introduce students to technology and children in less affluent communities are less likely to have access to the same technological resources at home as
do children in more affluent communities (Margolis et al., 2008). However, class was largely an invisible form of difference in the campaign as broad campaign discourses did not explicitly address it in any way. Because class is not explicitly brought up and kept invisible in these discourses, the women that the campaign is trying to encourage to pursue careers in “computing and I.T.” are silently presumed to all have access to the same technological resources, even though research on the digital divide shows that this is not the case.

Like the other forms of difference that I have addressed in this chapter, class was (in)visible in the sense that it was brought up only briefly in local contexts. However, what is notable is that when class was made visible and brought up in the context of the campaign, it sometimes took the form of classist discourse. For instance, one participant in the campaign wrote a story that was published on the website in which she states that “I am proud to be a woman in I.T. because we are an elite class of women who also happen to make lots of money.” She thus states that she – and other women in the field – are more elite than women who work in many other fields. Certainly, “computing and I.T.” is a relatively high paying field when compared to many others (C. Ashcraft & Blithe, 2009; Ensmenger, 2010b) and research on the gender wage gap has also shown that the wage gap between what women make and what men make in “computing and I.T.” is less than it is in many other fields (C. Ashcraft & Blithe, 2009; McCall, 2001).
However, considering technical women to be an “elite class of women” tacitly denigrates many women, especially those who work in female-dominated fields such as nursing and primary school education. In this instance, class is thus not brought up to address unequal access to technology, but to reify a hierarchal order of occupations in which “computing and I.T.” (a male-dominated field) is above other fields (including those that are female-dominated, which is ironic in a campaign that purports to help women).

A campaign team member also tacitly made social class visible during an interview. Once again, class was brought up in order to present “computing and I.T.” as a better career choice than traditional female-dominated occupations:

So yeah, for me, a lot of it is about economic self-sufficiency and giving women options that are high-paying options. You don’t have to be a nurse. A nurse or a teacher and all of these really traditional things, you can learn, grab yourself a book and learn how to program and start becoming a technically savvy person. And you can get a job.

Whereas social justice and economic self-sufficiency for women are at the heart of this participant’s reasons for participating in the campaign, promoting these values is done at the expense of presenting traditional women’s work as a less worthy career choice. Making class visible thus once again took the form of classist discourse that reinstates a hierarchy of occupations according to which ones pay the most, without interrogating why some occupations pay more than others and how this is fundamentally linked
to social identities such as gender and class (K. L. Ashcraft, 2013; Weeden, 2002).

My analysis shows that class, like many of the other forms of difference that I have examined in this chapter, is largely unaddressed. Keeping class invisible thus silently presumes that all women whom the “Sit With Me” campaign is purporting to help have access to the same technological resources, despite that access and exposure to technology is very much mediated through social class. Moreover, when class is brought up in local contexts and discourse, it isn’t brought up to recognize how class mediates access to technology and the chances that an individual may have to pursue a career in “computing and I.T.,” but to reinstate a hierarchy of occupations in which “computing and I.T.” is at the top.

**Occupational Alignment**

What is “computing and I.T.” work anyway? Throughout this dissertation, I’ve been using it in quotation marks to underscore that there is no objective, factual answer to that question. Just like the social identity of “computing and I.T.” is constituted through discursive struggles that are inherently political, so too are the parameters of what is “computing and I.T.” work and what isn’t. Clearly, this claim is very consistent with my queer metatheoretical assumptions, but it is also strongly supported in my data. Indeed, among the participants in the “Sit With Me” campaign, there is very little consensus as to the way that the campaign should name the field that it
is attempting to de-segregate. For instance, should we instead just name the field “computing”? Or just “information technology”? What about “computer science”, “technology”, or “technology and computing”? All of these titles are ways in which the field could potentially be named. And my analysis below demonstrates, different occupational titles are invoked by the participants who speak on behalf of the “Sit With Me” campaign.

First, let’s consider the annual summits that NCWIT organizes. At both the 2011 summit that took place in New York and the 2012 summit that took place in Chicago, I attended the plenary sessions that were devoted to explaining the *raison d’être* of NCWIT to the summit attendees, mostly representatives from NCWIT affiliated organizations. At these plenary sessions, NCWIT reads its mission and defines the field in which the organization seeks to increase the representation of women, which it calls “information technology”. The fact that NCWIT’s mission statement refers to the field as “information technology” is hardly surprising; after all, NCWIT does stand for the National Center for Women and Information Technology. However, its use of the term “information technology” is inconsistent throughout the “Sit With Me” campaign. Indeed, in my analysis of official campaign materials, I noted five different terms that are used interchangeably to name the field: “information technology”, “technology”, “computing”, “computing and I.T.”, and “technology and computing”. For instance, we can read in the Sit With Me toolkit that “Sit With Me is about
recognizing and celebrating the important role women play in technology” (emphasis added), that “the reality is that women in computing and I.T. face significant obstacles” (emphasis added), that “women hold only 25% of technology and computing jobs”, that Sit With Me seeks to “acknowledge the valuable contributions of women in computing” (emphasis added) and that “Sit With Me uses an iconic Red Chair to symbolize that women in technology need more seats at the table” (emphasis added). As such, the title that is used to refer to the occupation of “computing and I.T.” work is shifting even in the official discourse of the “Sit With Me” campaign, which demonstrates that the field that the campaign is seeking to de-segregate does not have a single, unified identity.

Because each of the terms used to name the field of “computing and I.T.” implies something different about the work that this field involves, there are important tensions among participants in the “Sit With Me” campaign as to what is “computing and I.T.” work and what is not. Take, for instance, one of the earliest “Sit With Me” events that took place at a major international airport in order to promote women gate controllers. Tensions and discursive struggles ensued over whether the “Sit With Me” campaign should actually seeking to promote women gate controllers; that is, are gate controllers included in the campaign’s (and NCWIT’s) definition of “computing and I.T.” work? According to one NCWIT staff member who went to the airport, absolutely. In an interview, she stated that there is a great amount of
incredible software embedded into planes and that people who work in the flight tower also use and integrate software. As such, this staff member firmly believes that gate controllers are included in the field in which the “Sit With Me” campaign is seeking to promote women.

Not all NCWIT staff members and participants in the “Sit With Me” campaign agree, however. In an interview, one participant stated that although she hadn’t participated in the event at the airport, she watched a video that was created to showcase the event – a video that she saw as fundamentally problematic. She stated that this event was “so clearly not part of our mission”, which is to increase the representation of women in the undefined field of “information technology”. By stating that the airport event was clearly not a part of NCWIT's mission, this staff member is thus rejecting that airport gate controllers work in the field of “information technology”. As such, she defines the field in a more restricted way than the other NCWIT staff member who strongly believes in the relevance of the airport event because of the software that these workers use and integrate. Furthermore, the staff member who is concerned with the airport event stated that the video “showed a lot of women in dark rooms pushing buttons, they weren’t programmers.” She thus not only rejects the notion that airport gate controllers are “information technology” workers, but also establishes clear boundaries around the type of work in which NCWIT is seeking to increase the representation of women: programmers. Consequently, these staff
members have very different conceptions about both what “information technology” is and who “information technology” workers are.

The above analysis shows that the construct of “occupations”, including what specific work and tasks are performed by people in a given occupation, is very much a political struggle. This finding is consistent with the literature on occupational rhetoric and professionalization that I reviewed earlier (Abbott, 1988; Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; G. A. Fine, 1996; Witz, 1992). But what makes this analysis particularly poignant is that we see how fragmented the occupation of “computing and I.T.” – and, by extension, the “Sit With Me” campaign – really is. The fragmentation of “computing and I.T.” is important to attend to because the tasks that different “computing and I.T.” workers do are themselves forms of difference that matter, just like gender, race, sexuality, ability status, language, and class. Furthermore, it is thus not only the occupation of “computing and I.T.” that is segregated on the basis of multiple forms of difference, but specific tasks and jobs within “computing and I.T.” The high-level task of programming, for instance, is more segregated along the lines of gender and sex than the lower-level task of data entry (Scott-Dixon, 2004). Consequently, the broad way in which the campaign’s discourse discusses “computing and I.T.” silences differences among “computing and I.T.” workers, some of whom are more privileged than others.
Summary

So far in this chapter, we have explored the ways in which various forms of difference are relevant to the “Sit With Me” campaign. My analysis shows that gender is by far the form of difference that is the most visible in the campaign, which is understandable considering the avowed purpose of both NCWIT’s work and the “Sit With Me” campaign: increase the representation of women in “computing and I.T.”. However, not all women are the same and not all women are privileged and disadvantaged in the same ways. Race, sexuality, ability status, language, class, and occupational alignment are also forms of difference that mediate women’s experiences and access to careers in “computing and I.T.”, but that the campaign’s emphasis on the categories of “women” and “men” is unable to fully interrogate.

Certain communication styles also mediate an individual’s experience of privilege and/or disadvantage, with “masculine” communication styles tending to be more valued in professional U.S. workplaces (Acker, 1990; Buzzanell, 1995; DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007; Holmer Nadesan & Tretheway, 2000). As we saw earlier, these dominant communication styles are reified rather than challenged in the context of the “Sit With Me” campaign when a participant sat in the red chair to talk about a program that helps women adopt a more masculine communication style.

In the spirit of researcher reflexivity and as stated both in Chapter 4 and at the beginning of this chapter, I understand that my way of organizing
this chapter – most notably by having separate sections on race, sexuality, ability, language, class, and occupational alignment – serves to reify these forms of difference in the same way that the campaign’s discourse reifies gender by treating each of these differences as discrete. However, I do not contend that these differences should or can be analyzed discretely. My intention is simply to show that exclusionary discourses about who can and/or should work in “computing and I.T.” rest upon multiple forms of difference. Consequently, only addressing exclusionary discourses related to gender is not enough, as many women (and men) will continue to fall out of the normative discourses of who “computing and I.T.” workers are if other exclusionary discourses are not simultaneously challenged.

However, addressing all exclusionary discourses surrounding who can or should work in “computing and I.T.” would prove to be an impossible task. In this analysis alone, I’ve identified a minimum of six other types of exclusionary discourses that the “Sit With Me” campaign would have to explicitly address if it were to do so: race, sexuality, ability status, language, class, and occupational alignment. Treating these forms of difference as discrete and attempting to disrupt all of them in an occupational rebranding campaign would already be a daunting and challenging task. Moreover, attempting to do so would not even be a particularly fruitful exercise, as those are not even all of the exclusionary discourses that such a campaign would have to explicitly challenge. As Butler (2007) notes, attempting to
address multiple forms of difference such as race, sexuality, and ability status inevitably end with an “embarrassed ‘etc.’” (p. 196) at the end of the list because no analyst can claim to be able to identify and address all forms of difference that matter in any given context. Indeed, Sedgwick (2008) theorizes difference through the metaphor of the closet to underscore that even though a particular form of difference may not appear to be salient in any one context, it may simply be closeted on the surface but deeply relevant and consequential.

My above analysis may seem relatively pessimistic. I’ve claimed that “Sit With Me”’s exclusive focus upon the categories of “women” and “men” are problematic and that it should consider difference more broadly, but yet I’ve also claimed that no matter how hard the campaign team tries, it’s never going to be able to explicitly address and challenge all of the exclusionary discourses that surround who can and should work in “computing and I.T.”. In other words, a paradox of inclusivity surrounds the campaign: no matter how many forms of difference it seeks to be inclusive of, some socially significant forms of difference will remain unaddressed. In the remainder of this chapter, I argue that categorical thinking is at the root of this paradox of inclusivity and that this paradox can best be managed and averted by evacuating categorical thinking from occupational rebranding campaigns and adopting a queer approach to understand difference at work.
The Campaign’s Paradox of Inclusivity

As discussed many times in this dissertation, one of the most sought-out goals of the “Sit With Me” campaign was to be inclusive. Both campaign team members and NCWIT member representatives consistently repeated that anyone can participate in the campaign and that anyone can sit in the red chair. The campaign team’s concern for inclusivity was evident from one of the very first campaign meetings, when a prominent member of the campaign team stated that she wanted to make sure that as many people as possible feel implicated in this campaign.

Two years after “Sit With Me” had been chosen by NCWIT and its Pacesetter representatives as the theme of its campaign to increase the representation of women in “computing and I.T.,” I asked another prominent campaign team member in an interview what “inclusivity” means to her and if she felt that reaching out beyond women to other underrepresented populations in the field was a part of the campaign’s goal and NCWIT’s overall mission. She responded by stating that “our name is National Center for Women in IT, but whenever you work on a problem that has to do with one group of people dominating, you’re always looking for supporting all kinds of diversity and inclusion.” Clearly then, this campaign team member believes that it’s important for both NCWIT and the campaign to recognize and support “all kinds” of diversity and inclusion. Prominent members of NCWIT’s Social Science Advisory Board agree. At the board’s meeting at the
2011 NCWIT summit, one of the members stated that it’s no longer possible to discuss gender in “computing and I.T.” without attending to multiple forms of difference, especially race and ethnicity. However, the above statements are at relative odds with the “Sit With Me” campaign’s official and unofficial discourse. “Women” and “men” are hailed as the subjects of diversity of the campaign (e.g., Just & Christiansen, 2012) with other forms of difference being largely invisible and unproblematized. The campaign’s desire to be inclusive of “all kinds” of diversity and inclusion can thus be juxtaposed with difference being largely limited to the categories of “women” and “men” in the campaign’s discourse.

This findings chapter set out to provide answers to my second research question: what are the consequences of the discourse surrounding the “Sit With Me” campaign for relations of difference and the campaign’s goal of occupational desegregation? In regards to the consequences of the campaign for relations of difference and as stated above, my analysis has shown that the “Sit With Me” campaign’s discourse largely problematizes difference through the categories of “women” and “men” and leaves other forms of difference unproblematized. As such, while the campaign is working towards making the discourses surrounding “computing and I.T.” workers inclusive of women, exclusionary discourses on the basis of other forms of difference, including race, sexuality, ability status, language, and class, remain unchallenged, just as differences among the tasks performed by different
“computing and I.T.” workers are silenced. Moreover, exclusionary discourses are not just limited to the forms of difference that I mentioned above, as those are not the only bases for exclusionary occupational discourses in “computing and I.T.” work. As stated previously, queer theorists argue that it is not even possible to create an exhaustive list of all of the forms of difference that may matter in a given context because they are often closeted (Butler, 2007; Sedgwick, 2008). Thus, even if the campaign were to be successful at making the occupational identity of “computing and I.T.” workers as more inclusive of women, many women will still fall out of normative conceptions of who a “computing and I.T.” worker can be on the basis of multiple forms of difference. This poses a serious challenge to the campaign’s attempts to desegregate “computing and I.T.” work because it cannot simultaneously account for all of the social identity categories that form the basis for exclusionary discourses of “computing and I.T.” workers.

Another important consequence of the campaign’s discourse is that gender tends to be equated with sex and the campaign conceptualizes gender as referring to female and male bodies. Thus, a central assumption of the campaign is that in order to make occupational identity discourses of “computing and I.T.” more inclusive, more female bodies are needed in the field. Indeed, I showed earlier that much of the campaign’s discourse conceptualizes gender (which is equated with sex) as organizing discourse. Put differently, having a female body will lead an individual to communicate
differently on the basis of her subject position as a woman. As such, the campaign’s treatment of difference tends to equate difference with enduring bodily features rather than with the ways in which identity is interactionally accomplished. For instance, the concentration of male bodies in “computing and I.T.” is seen as the problem rather than the ways in which those male bodies (and female bodies) perform gender and other facets of identity, not only through their bodies (e.g., K. L. Ashcraft, 2013), but also through their discursive practices.

As I discuss in greater detail later in this chapter, viewing the segregation problem as only related to bodily features and not related to discursive performances of identity is questionable. One’s body does not determine an individual’s performances of identity (Butler, 2004; R. W. Connell, 1987, 2005; West & Fenstermaker, 1995; West & Zimmerman, 1987) and discursive performances of identity in everyday interactions play an important role in creating inclusive or non-inclusive organizational and occupational cultures (Keyton, 2005; Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008; Trice, 1993). Many women may therefore see “computing and I.T.” as a hostile and non-inclusive field not because there are too many male bodies that are concentration in this line of work, but because of the occupational culture that is sustained through the everyday discursive practices of all individuals who exercise that occupation, who happen to be mostly men. Moreover, many women working in “computing and I.T.” may feel that their
work environment is more or less hostile depending on the type of work that they are performing and whether this work is seen as more or less congruent with the forms of difference that they embody and perform.

The campaign’s exclusive focus on female and male bodies also has important consequences for the goal of occupational desegregation. Indeed, even if the campaign is successful at getting more female bodies into “computing and I.T.” work, there may still be an important concentration of particular types of socially marked bodies in this field and occupational segregation may thus still exist. For instance, bodies are also socially marked along multiple forms of difference that the campaign is not able to fully and explicitly address. Drawing from the metaphor of the glass slipper to understand occupational segregation (K. L. Ashcraft, 2013), if the campaign is successful more bodies may therefore be able to “fit” into the slipper that represents the field of “computing and I.T.”, but many bodies (including many female bodies) will continue to have shoe sizes too big or small for the slipper and thus continue to be excluded from normative discourses about who can or should work in the field.

Moreover, it isn’t just one’s bodily features that determine an individual’s fit into the glass slipper. As much extant research has shown, fitting into a certain line of work also entails engaging in discursive performances that are particularly valued in that occupational culture. For instance, fitting into blue-collar, white-collar, or pink-collar occupational
cultures entails engaging in very different gender performances and communicating in vastly different ways (Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2005; Collinson, 1992; Mumby, 2005). Thus, even if an occupation becomes less segregated by sex (which is operationalized in terms of bodies), it may still be segregated by gender (which is operationalized in terms of performance). In other words, normative discourses may become inclusive of women in “computing and I.T.” but not of the ways in which many of these women discursively construct and perform gender.

Thus far, my analysis has shown that the “Sit With Me” campaign’s treatment of difference leads to the paradox of inclusivity to which I alluded earlier. By paradox, I mean a social situation “in which the pursuit of an objective involves actions that are themselves antithetical to the desired end” (Stohl & Cheney, 2001, p. 354). In paradoxes, the primary goal of a group of actors is thus undermined by the side effects of the practices through which they go about achieving that goal. In the context of the “Sit With Me” campaign, the paradox of inclusivity stems from the inability of the campaign to name and be inclusive of all forms of difference that matter at work, no matter how many forms of difference it explicitly addresses. In other words, even if the campaign were to succeed at the challenging task of simultaneously challenging exclusionary discourses on the basis of gender, race, ability status, language, and class, an indefinite number of exclusionary discourses surrounding who can or should work in “computing and I.T.”,
which are related both to both material and immaterial features, would remain unchallenged.

Clearly, difference is much more complex than sex and many forms of difference are not even related to bodily features, but to discursive performances. Given the “Sit With Me” campaign’s exclusive focus on challenging difference related to sex, I proceed to question in greater detail what makes a line of work appear to be more or less inclusive to people who embody and perform difference in a particular way. Put differently, what is at the root of the problem of inclusivity in segregated occupations?

**Challenging Current Approaches to Occupational Rebranding**

My above analysis shows that the underlying assumptions of the “Sit With Me” campaign are very much in line with those that dominate current occupational (de)segregation research and practice. Indeed, both “Sit With Me” and dominant approaches to occupational (de)segregation research negotiate tensions between seeking to be inclusive of everyone, but of not being able to capture all socially significant forms of difference in their analyses. This was especially apparent in the “Sit With Me” campaign because the concept of “Sit With Me” was chosen by both the campaign team and NCWIT member representatives because it was seen as being the most inclusive campaign possible. However, while the campaign challenges exclusionary discourses that associate “computing and I.T.” with men, exclusionary discourses on the basis of many forms of difference, including
but certainly not limited to race, sexuality, ability status, language, and class. There is also no recognition that the nature of these exclusionary discourses shifts according to the type of work that a “computing and I.T.” worker performs (e.g., programming or data-entry).

In addition, both “Sit With Me” and dominant approaches to (de)segregation research conceptualize segregation and exclusion as related uniquely to bodily features. For instance, people with certain bodily features are grouped into identifiable categories of difference, an occupation is considered to be segregated when these groups of people are relatively absent in this occupation, and the goal of occupational desegregation is to find a way of making those absent groups of people present in that occupation (Branch, 2011; Charles & Grusky, 2004; Kaufman, 2010; McCall, 2001; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). The bodies in question are generally marked along one or two lines: either sex, race, or both. As we have seen, the “Sit With Me” campaign is explicitly concerned with the dearth of female bodies in the field of “computing and I.T.” and thus seeks to increase the number of female bodies in this field.

What is particularly important to note from my above analysis is the focus on bodily features rather than on embodied and discursive performances of identity. For instance, the “Sit With Me” campaign is concerned with the number of female bodies in “computing and I.T.,” as is evident in its constant reliance on and reification of the category “women.”
The same can be said about quantitative occupational (de)segregation research, which examines the number of female and male bodies in occupations, but not how these bodies perform gender and other facets of identity. What remains questionable, however, is whether the problem of inclusivity in occupational discourses and everyday occupational life is really related to a dearth of particular types of bodies or whether it is related to the ways in which the people in those bodies construct their identities, their organization’s culture, and their occupation’s culture in everyday discursive practices.

Whereas existing approaches to occupational (de)segregation research and practice are based on the assumption that the inclusivity problem is only related to a lack of people with a distinguishable set of bodily features, I argue here that the inclusivity problem is more complex. As such, I question the primary goal of occupational sex desegregation in the context of the “Sit With Me” campaign: getting more female bodies into “computing and I.T.”. Whereas the symbolic presence of particular bodies at work cannot be denied (Bruni et al., 2005; Gherardi, 1995), addressing the inclusivity problem at the heart of occupational (de)segregation research and practice also involves examining the ways in which inclusivity and hostility are communicatively constructed in everyday work interactions and embedded into certain organizational and occupational cultures and discourses. Inclusiveness can thus be addressed in qualitative terms (inclusivity is created through
everyday interactions) in addition to being addressed in quantitative terms (inclusivity is created by getting more underrepresented bodies into a given line of work).

There is extensive evidence in the research literature as to why occupational (de)segregation research and practice should go beyond counting bodies and looking at embodied and discursive performances of identity. For instance, in Gherardi and Poggio’s (2007) extensive narrative study of women working in the male-dominated occupation of engineering, they found that many women who shared stories with them felt different from men, but also different from other women. Indeed, many women emphasized affinities and similarities with their male colleagues and stated that they identified with both women and men. Although this reinforces gender power dynamics in the workplace, many women also saw men as an aspirational reference group to which they would like to belong. What this study shows is that the problem of inclusivity for women in male-dominated occupations is not just related to female bodies being a numerical minority. These women identify with both women and men and look up to their male colleagues. The challenges that they face as women in a male-dominated occupation cannot be seen as being only related to the predominance of male bodies per se, but linked to a variety of factors, including everyday interactions that can make them feel like “intruders” and “outsiders.”
My empirical material provides even stronger support for the idea that the difficulties of many women in male-dominated occupations are not necessarily linked to a dearth of other people in female bodies working with them, but rather to the ways in which an occupational culture deemed hostile to many “women” is constructed in everyday interactions and gender performances. For instance, when my research participants discussed some of the challenges of being a woman in the field of “computing and I.T.”, there was little mention of bodies and there not being enough people who “look like them” in the field. Rather, they tended to refer to everyday communication practices and identity performances that created an occupational culture that they find hostile and exclusionary. For instance, one NCWIT member representative stated at the 2011 NCWIT summit that the “the culture of IT is not always welcoming” whereas another member representative stated that the “biggest challenge of being a woman in I.T. is feeling respected.” Neither of these comments implies that the challenge of being a woman in “computing and I.T.” is only or directly related to the low concentration of female bodies and the high concentration of male bodies. Rather, they believe that the challenge is at least partially linked to a hostile occupational culture that is enacted through everyday interactions – a culture in which many people who happen to identify as women, as well as some people who identify as men, do not feel respected.
Many other female participants related the exclusionary discourses surrounding “computing and I.T.” work to its occupational culture rather than to the predominance of male bodies in the field. One participant gave the following explanation of why she would sit in the red chair to support the “Sit With Me” campaign:

For me personally, I would probably be sitting for all of the times that I have heard it, just in the computer lab, you code well for a girl. Or the tiny little comments along these lines from professors and classmates that we are female and therefore we don’t have the capacities or abilities that they do.

This participant clearly feels that she faces discriminatory comments from her professors and colleagues because of her being a “woman” pursuing a career in the field of “computing and I.T.”. Although she doesn’t state this explicitly, an underlying assumption is that those discriminatory comments (such as “you code well for a girl”) were made by men – not women. However, the root of the problem isn’t the concentration of male bodies in this field per se. She did not state that she feels uncomfortable working with men or that the problem is that few other people in her field look like her or have a female body. Rather, the problem that she faced was linked to the ways in which particular men (such as some of her professors and colleagues) discursively constructed a non-inclusive occupational culture by telling her that she codes well for a girl. Because masculinity can be performed in a variety of different ways (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; R. W. Connell, 2005; West & Zimmerman, 1987), the mere concentration of male bodies in this field does not directly
lead to the non-inclusive culture that she describes. Indeed, I have a male body and would never tell someone that she does something well for a girl, and I don’t believe that any of my close male friends would either. The problem of inclusivity in “computing and I.T.” can thus be seen as being linked to everyday interactions and to cultures that value performances of masculinity that are sustained through such comments, as opposed to being only related to the predominance of male bodies. As such, both “Sit With Me” and research on occupational (de)segregation have yet to attend to how occupational segregation is about more than the predominance or lack of people with certain bodily features; occupational segregation is also about embodied and discursive performances of identity that create and sustain exclusionary occupational cultures.

Another important argument for examining difference beyond bodies is that some bodies don’t fall into the male-female binary that is implied both in the “Sit With Me” campaign’s discourse and in research on occupational (de)segregation. For instance, the campaign’s official texts include statements such as “it’s about women and men coming together,” “Sit With Me seeks to provide “a gathering place for people (women, men, technical, non-technical),” and “men and women can sit in support and solidarity for technical women.” In these statements, the exclusive focus on female and male bodies presents gender as being a binary of women and men, even though transgender and intersex bodies do not fit nicely into one of those
categories. In this sense, transgender and intersex individuals are excluded from not only the dominant discourses surrounding “computing and I.T.,” but also from the campaign’s discourse, which is another concrete illustration of the campaign’s paradox of inclusivity. The way in which binaries function to exclude people who fall out of normative discourses is another reason why I argue that difference needs to be destabilized in occupational rebranding campaigns and considered outside of binary constructs, which is at the heart of the queer approach to occupational (de)segregation that I develop in greater detail in Chapter 7.

As I stated previously, my point is not to deny that the symbolic presence of female and male bodies matters in contemporary workplaces. As Butler (1993) argues, bodies do matter. In everyday organizational life, individuals are easily identified as women or men and are treated accordingly. And although women in male-dominated workplaces in Gherardi and Poggio’s (2007) study tended to describe their difficulties in terms of gender and not sex, some women did note that the symbolic presence of their bodies in a male-dominated workplace was an important challenge. For these women, having more female bodies at work would be beneficial. Similarly, a minority of my female participants identified the high concentration of male bodies in the field of “computing and I.T.” as what was most challenging to them. No comment illustrates that point better than one participant who wrote that “the biggest challenge of being a woman in I.T. is
fat guys with beards.” For her, being in “computing and I.T.” is especially hostile because of people with certain bodily features being overrepresented in this field.

Although I do not deny the incontestable claim that the symbolic presence of female or male bodies makes a difference in organizational life, I do challenge the assumption that getting more female bodies into male-dominated occupations will solve the problems of occupational inclusivity that stem from occupational segregation. Indeed, much extant research has shown that women can support ideologies that make organizational life difficult for women just as much as men do (K. L. Ashcraft & Pacanowsky, 1996; Dryburgh, 1999; Jorgenson, 2002; Scott-Dixon, 2004). Research on bullying also shows that female to female bullying is the most common and often most severe form of bullying in contemporary organizational life (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007). Even recent news stories show how having more women in workplaces doesn’t necessarily lead to policies that are considered to especially help women. One of the first actions that Marissa Mayer posed when she became CEO of the major technology company Yahoo was to end Yahoo’s policy of enabling employees to telework from home – whereas job flexibility and the possibility of working from home are commonly perceived as being particularly beneficial for female workers upon whom childcare responsibilities disproportionally lie.
So far, I have challenged current approaches to the study of occupational (de)segregation and the practice of occupational rebranding because they only address forms of difference related to bodily features. However, the problem of current ways of conceptualizing occupational (de)segregation and rebranding goes beyond their neglect of immaterial forms of difference, such as those rooted in everyday discursive practices. Rather, the problem lies in categorical thinking itself. First, categorical thinking is problematic because there are an infinite number of identity categories that we can develop to understand the complexities of occupational segregation. The development of categorical schemes is arbitrary, and no matter how many categories we develop, there are always going to be exceptions to the rule and people whose experiences do not fit nicely into any given categorical scheme. Moreover, making generalizations within identity categories is problematic because the people within any given category have multiple identifications and also fit within other categories. Consequently, to make analytic claims about “women” or “men” implies that these are discrete units of analysis, but people’s experiences as “men” or as “women” can never be separated from all of the other forms of difference that they perform and embody. Because it is impossible to develop a categorization scheme that simultaneously accounts for all of these forms of difference, relying upon categorical thought to conceptualize occupational (de)segregation and rebranding is bound to lead scholars and practitioners to making broad
claims about heterogeneous groups of people who experience privilege and/or disadvantage in very different ways. Such claims preclude both scholars and practitioners from understanding important nuances regarding difference at work and how work is organized around difference. Consequently, evacuating categorical thought from occupational (de)segregation research and practice has great potential to generate important new insights about how difference matters at work and how practitioners can make interventions to foster more inclusive occupational and organizational cultures.

In this chapter, I have argued that problems of workplace inclusivity are linked to both bodily features and identity performances, but that the “Sit With Me” campaign and scholarship on occupational (de)segregation places an overwhelming emphasis upon bodily features. Moreover, I have demonstrated how the categorical thinking at the heart of current approaches to occupational (de)segregation research and practice inevitably leads to a paradox of inclusivity, as developing a categorization scheme that accounts for all socially significant forms of difference is not feasible. Categorical thinking thus inevitably leads to some important forms of difference from being excluded from the analysis, even though all forms of difference are always experienced together and never separately. As such, occupational (de)segregation scholars and practitioners need to fundamentally change the ways in which they approach the phenomenon of occupational (de)segregation
in order to address occupational inclusivity in a way that both (1) emphasizes bodily features and identity performances, and (2) does not rely upon categorical thought. In the next and final chapter of this dissertation, I argue that adopting an approach to occupational (de)segregation and rebranding that is rooted in queer theory is particularly amenable to addressing occupational inclusivity in a way that addresses the two issues mentioned above and that enables scholars and practitioners of occupational (de)segregation and rebranding to escape the paradox of inclusivity that I have identified in the “Sit With Me” campaign.
CHAPTER VII

ESCAPING THE PARADOX OF INCLUSIVITY: 
A QUEER APPROACH TO OCCUPATIONAL BRANDING

In the previous chapter, I identified a paradox of inclusivity that is a central organizing element of the “Sit With Me” campaign and that is at the heart of current approaches to occupational desegregation and rebranding. This paradox of inclusivity stems from the campaign’s participants treating forms of difference as discrete from one another (e.g., gender, race, sexuality, etc.) even though they are intertwined and can be only analyzed together. That is, exclusionary occupational discourses related to gender cannot be effectively challenged without simultaneously challenging exclusionary discourses that are intertwined with and cannot be separated from gender. The “Sit With Me” campaign has thus run into a paradox of inclusivity because it has been developed on the assumption that it is possible to treat multiple forms of difference as separate from each other when it isn’t possible to do so. Moreover, even if multiple forms of difference such as gender, race, and sexuality were explicitly problematized in the campaign, other socially significant forms of difference would continue to be unaddressed because they cannot be named and organized into categories as such. Put differently, no matter how hard one tries to develop categories that will explicitly address all forms of difference around which work is organized, some forms of difference will inevitably continue to be excluded from the analysis.
Stohl and Cheney (2001) contend that recognizing paradoxes is the first step towards productively managing them. In this concluding chapter, I thus reflect on how it may be possible to escape the paradox of inclusivity that is at the heart of the categorical thinking upon which the “Sit With Me” campaign rests. To that end, I argue that in order to escape the campaign’s paradox of inclusivity, scholars of occupational (de)segregation and practitioners seeking to rebrand occupations for greater inclusivity can benefit from an approach to occupational (de)segregation research and practice that is rooted in queer theory and that renders fluid forms of difference that the campaign’s discourse currently treats as discrete.

I begin this chapter by outlining what approaching occupational (de)segregation and rebranding through queer theory entails and subsequently illustrating how the “Sit With Me” campaign can be reimagined through this approach. Afterwards, I summarize the theoretical and practical contributions of my study and articulate an agenda for future research that can extend the queer approach to occupational (de)segregation and rebranding that I develop.

**Outlining a Queer Approach to Occupational Rebranding**

In Chapters 5 and 6, I argued that scholars and practitioners of occupational (de)segregation and rebranding have a vested interest in rethinking many of their fundamental assumptions because of the paradox of inclusivity that stems from the categorical thinking that is currently at the
heart of their practices. In this section, I argue that a queer approach to occupational rebranding enables scholars and practitioners to overcome the paradox of inclusivity by conceptualizing difference as fluid and by putting the actual work practices in which “computing and I.T.” professionals engage at their center of their analyses.

Queer theory, which I discussed more extensively in Chapter 2, is primarily concerned with undermining stable notions of identity (Hammers & Brown, 2004; Parker, 2002). Queer theorists thus argue that reifying identity categories such as “women,” “men,” “gay,” and “straight” is problematic because those labels mask important intra-group differences (Meeks, 2007). Moreover, because multiple forms of difference are always experienced simultaneously, queer theory views any attempt to isolate particular forms of difference as unproductive. An individual’s placement in or identification with a particular category of difference (for instance, “women”) is thus not considered to be sufficient to explain individual behavior and identity performances, as the nuances of embodied identity constructions and relations with others are much more complex than being placed in or identifying with any individual category (Gannon, 2011). Queer theory thus outlines an approach to difference that represents an important shift from mainstream approaches to difference in feminist research and practice (Butler, 2007). Whereas the latter have historically tended to
emphasize relatively stable, discrete notions of identity, queer theory views identities as fluid, shifting, and multiple.

Queer theory has slowly been gaining traction in organizational research. As discussed in Chapter 2, queer theory has mainly been used as a theoretical frame to analyze cultural texts about work and organizations in this emerging organizational literature (e.g., Bowring, 2004; Tyler & Cohen, 2008). However, queer theory has also been used as a framework to rethink some fundamental assumptions about existing organizational theories. For instance, queer theory has been used to critique theories of “feminine organizations” on the basis that binaries such as masculinity/femininity and rationality/emotionality are arbitrary constructions that have no grounding in material reality (Brewis et al., 1997). In addition, a recent article published in one of the field’s top journals shows the merit of re-examining leadership theories through the lens of queer theory (Harding et al., 2011). However, because the implications of queer theory for occupational (de)segregation research and practice have not yet been examined, my goal here is to show what both scholars and practitioners can gain from rethinking occupational rebranding through a queer lens. I thus seek to answer the double question: what does it mean to and what can be gained from queering occupational rebranding scholarship and practices?

As Parker (2002) states, queering involves creating “a certain ‘nervousness’ about words, and about practices, and about the relationship
between them... for making fluid what was seen as foundational” (p. 52). To queer the notion of occupational rebranding for desegregation thus entails critically examining and deconstructing some of the most basic foundations of this phenomenon, including the very bases on which a given occupation can be said to be segregated or not. In addition, queering occupational rebranding scholarship and practice dethrones singular assumptions, such as presuming that the only solution to the problem of occupational segregation is to increase the representation of women or men in a given occupation (M. Parker, 2001). The problem of occupational segregation is thus recast in broader, more inclusive terms in order to examine how occupational segregation has roots in and consequences beyond the commonly deployed categories of sex and race.

One of the most important implications of queering current approaches to occupational rebranding is to deconstruct seemingly fixed, stable, and discrete identity categories by instead viewing occupational diversity and inclusivity through the lens of what Parker (2001; 2002) has called sheer difference. As such, a queer approach leads scholars and practitioners to thinking about how all people are different from each other in important ways, including people who are commonly grouped into categories such as “women,” “men,” “African-American,” and “white.” There is no attempt to identify commonalities based on group differences because of the heterogeneity that lies within each of these groups.
Re-conceptualizing difference in this way would benefit both the practice of occupational rebranding and occupational (de)segregation research in a number of important ways. First, queering occupational rebranding entails analyzing differences as intertwined with each other instead of as discrete. As such, practitioners do not choose which forms of difference they will explicitly include and which forms of difference will consequently exclude from their analyses, thereby averting the paradox of inclusivity. Second, queering occupational rebranding enables practitioners to account for difference in more complex ways, most notably by looking at difference beyond any particular set of bodily features. A queer approach thus complicates the notion that segregation is only about bodily features and that the solution to the problem of segregation is only to increase the number of bodies classified as either “male” or “female” in a given occupation, since inclusivity is constructed at least as much in everyday interactions as it is in bodily features. As such, the faulty assumption that having more people with a set of distinguishable bodily features (e.g., women) will make things better for all people who have similar bodily features is dethroned. Indeed, we saw in Chapter 6 that people who identify as women can subscribe to the very ideologies that tend to disadvantage more women than men in this field (K. L. Ashcraft & Pacanowsky, 1996; Dryburgh, 1999; Irvine & Vermilya, 2010; Mumby, 1997b; Scott-Dixon, 2004; Townsley & Geist, 2000). Queering occupational rebranding thus entails viewing difference outside of
predetermined identity categories on the basis of a particular set of bodily features, thereby enabling researchers and practitioners of occupational rebranding to escape an important part of the current paradox of inclusivity that they face.

As seen above, one of the most important contributions of a queer approach to occupational rebranding is to bring the concept of discursive performance into the broad, interdisciplinary literature on occupational (de)segregation that has tended to focus exclusively on bodily features. In addition to examining difference in occupational life as it is manifested in bodies (e.g., what is the percentage of men in a given occupation and what do these men look like?), a queer approach leads us to viewing difference as related to discursive performances (e.g., which discursive performances construct an inclusive occupational culture and which performances mark a given occupation as more naturally suited to people who embody and perform some forms of difference rather than others?). Consequently, a queer approach does not consider *a priori* that the simple concentration of female or male bodies in a given line of work is a problem that requires intervention. Rather, occupational segregation is a problem when occupational cultures mark a given line of work as being more natural to people who embody or perform difference in any given way. Thus, the problem in “computing and I.T.” is not the concentration of male bodies, but comments such as “you code
well for a girl” that imply that people in male bodies are more apt to work in this field than people in female bodies.

Butler’s (2007) theory of gender performativity provides a particularly useful way to understand how occupational rebranding for desegregation can be viewed through the concept of performance. Butler (2007) argues that gender is performative; that is, certain practices are always already gendered in normative, societal discourses and it is through their enactment that we become recognizable gendered subjects. In other words, individuals are aware of the normative discourses surrounding what it means to be a “man” or a “woman” and it is through the unconscious, repeated enactment of these discourses that individuals become recognizable as women or men (Lee, Learmonth, & Harding, 2008). As such, everyone is always engaging in a type of “drag” but drag only becomes visible and recognized as such when individuals subvert, rather than conform to, normative conceptions about how one should stylize her or his body (Bourcier, 2011). Indeed, because she argues that there is no essential, preexisting gender identity that is abiding in individuals, Butler (2004, 2007) encourages scholars to examine how individuals constitute their gender identities in ways that subvert normative discourses about how they should act because of a set of bodily features that they have, thereby complicating seemingly fixed notions such as “woman” and “man.” Consequently, examining performances of difference in segregated occupations entails interrogating how individuals subvert
normative discourses while exercising a given occupation, thereby inhibiting us from claiming that it is necessary to have more people with a particular set of bodily features (e.g., women) in any given line of work. When applied to occupational (de)segregation scholarship, Butler’s (2007) theory of gender performativity thus shows us the importance of avoiding broad claims such as “we need more women in ‘computing and I.T.’ work” since according to her, nothing can be presumed about abstract women who may enter “computing and I.T.” work because there is no preexisting gender identity behind the label “women.”

So far in this chapter, I have argued that a queer approach to occupational (de)segregation research and practice is needed because it enables us to escape the tensions and paradoxes that arise from addressing difference at work through categorical thinking. However, this leads to the question: if categorical thinking is the problem and we avoid naming specific identity categories, what other options do we have for addressing difference in occupational rebranding campaigns? Here, I argue that abstaining from organizing these campaigns around stable identity categories such as “women” opens up opportunities for talking about actual work practices. Thus, a queer approach to occupational rebranding involves bringing the material aspects of particular lines of work to the center of analysis.

Much can be gained by focusing upon the material aspects of work rather than upon stabilized identity categories. For instance, it is clear that
any given occupation is not for everybody. A construction worker, for instance, requires a certain level of physical strength that not everyone has (Chan, 2013). Similarly, anyone who works in the field of “computing and I.T.” requires a certain level of technical knowledge about computer systems and programming that some people process more easily than others (Kelan, 2008). Consequently, it would be highly problematic to claim that anyone can work in a given occupation. Claiming that anyone can work in a given occupation would especially be problematic given that such claims would run the serious risk of devaluing that line of work, since workers would be seen as less valuable and easily replaceable (K. L. Ashcraft et al., 2012; K. L. Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004b). A queer occupational rebranding campaign would thus not make the claim that anyone can do a given occupation and should therefore consider it. Rather, a queer occupational rebranding campaign would claim that differences related to social identities play no role in determining whether or not a person is more or less apt to work in a particular area. Concretely then, such a campaign would emphasize that an individual cannot be seen as more naturally suited to construction work simply because he identifies as a man. Not all men are stronger than women and some women would make much better construction workers than men. Indeed, I’ll humbly say that regardless of my male identification, I would be a laughing stock on a construction site because I do not have the physical strength that is required to do that kind of work. The goal of a queer
occupational desegregation campaign in the context of construction work would thus be to debunk the assumption that women just don’t have the physical strength or capacities to do such work by showing that we cannot make any clear cut assumptions about one’s capacity to do such work only on the basis of one’s identification as a “woman”.

In sum, the problem with current approaches to occupational rebranding is that they do not distinguish between the categories of difference that they name and the material features of work in a given field. For instance, one of the most common reasons for getting more women into technology that was cited in the “Sit With Me” campaign is because “women are great technical thinkers.” However, that claim is a huge generalization and incorrect: some women are great technical thinkers, and some are not. Just like some men are great technical thinkers, and some are not. The queer approach to occupational rebranding that I am advocating would break that connection: “computing and I.T.” would be marketed to “great technical thinkers” regardless of any particular form of difference. Indeed, according to queer theory, social identities such as gender, race, sexuality, native language, and others do not play a role in whether or not a person is a good technical thinker – and that is what a queer approach to occupational rebranding would reiterate again and again. Such a campaign would thus seek to separate difference from work entirely, rather than reifying it around predetermined identity categories.
Organizing an occupational rebranding campaign around the material aspects of work has the great advantage of marketing an occupation to the types of people who are the most qualified or suited to a given occupation on the basis of their interests and competencies, rather than on the basis of any stable identity category to which they are ascribed. Thus, a man who is a great technical thinker may still fall out of normative conceptions of who is best suited to pursue a career in “computing and I.T.” and his contributions to the field can be just as important as those that a female great technical thinker could make. Moreover, organizing a campaign around competencies rather than difference will relate with everyone who is a great technical thinker, not just women. The goal of a queer rebranding campaign is thus to get all great technical thinkers into a given field, regardless of difference, and to thus address a broader audience of people who have the potential to contribute to the field.

So far in this chapter, I have shown how queering occupational rebranding entails escaping the paradox of inclusivity that is inherent to current ways of going about rebranding. For one, a queer approach enables scholars and practitioners to escape the paradox of inclusivity by no longer trying to achieve the impossible: naming all forms of difference that matter and attempting to explicitly smash all of them. All forms of difference are thus conceptualized as intertwined and inseparable, as opposed to discrete. Moreover, such an approach enables us to work towards separating work
from difference in all of its forms, and instead emphasizing the material features of particular kinds of work that can either appeal or not appeal to anyone, regardless of any forms of difference they may embody or perform. This is a far cry from current approaches to occupational rebranding, which make broad claims about a group of individuals who share an identifiable set of bodily features and imply that it is these bodily features, rather than a particular set of skills and interests, that we need more of in a particular line of work. Instead, a queer approach to occupational rebranding has at its core the assumption that difference is not related to a given set of skills or interests and that it therefore does not make sense to argue that a given group of people (e.g., women) is particularly well suited – or is not suited – to a given line of work. An important goal of queer occupational rebranding is thus to curb all discourse that implies that difference makes people more or less apt to work in a particular field (from statements such as “women are good technical thinkers so we need more of them in I.T.” to remarks such as “you code well for a girl”).

In this section, I have outlined the principles of what I have called a queer approach to occupational rebranding. However, my analyses in Chapters 5 and 6 clearly demonstrates that NCWIT’s “Sit With Me” campaign is based upon principles that are much more in line with conventional approaches to occupational rebranding that conceptualize forms of difference as being discrete from each other and as only related to bodily
features. How, then, can we reimagine the “Sit With Me” campaign through the queer approach to occupational (de)segregation that I have outlined here? I engage this question in the following section of this chapter.

**Reimagining “Sit With Me” Through Queer Theory**

So far in this dissertation, I have primarily focused on deconstructing and analyzing the discursive processes through which the “Sit With Me” campaign has developed, as well as the ways in which the campaign constructs multiple forms of difference. In the spirit of productive critique, making a difference, and showcasing the potential for communication studies to be a practical discipline that develops useful new ways of thinking about communication problems (Craig, 1999, 2006; Timmerman, 2009a, 2009b), I now turn my attention to re-imagining how a queer approach to occupational rebranding can inform the “Sit With Me” campaign. Put differently, after deconstructing the campaign, I now proceed to reconstruct it (e.g., J. Martin, 1990) in order to show how a group of practitioners could go about developing and executing a queer occupational rebranding campaign in the context of “computing and I.T.” work.

One of the most substantial ways in which a queer “Sit With Me” would depart from the current form of the campaign would be to rethink the question at its very center, which is currently formulated as such: how can we get more female bodies into “computing and I.T.” work? Because a queer approach to occupational rebranding empties categories such as “women” of
any essence because of all of the differences masked by such categories, the campaign would be reorganized around the question: how can we separate the notion of difference from normative discourses about who is best suited to the field of “computing and I.T.”? The advantage of reformulating the goal of the campaign in this way is that it debunks the assumptions that inclusivity is principally related to a concentration of male bodies in “computing and I.T.” and that getting more women into “computing and I.T.” will bring some added value to the field that men cannot bring. Indeed, the campaign’s revised goal recognizes that exclusionary occupational discourses aren’t just related to bodily features and embodied performances, but also to discursive performances (e.g., comments such as “you code well for a girl,” as I discussed in Chapter 6) and to multiple forms of difference that cannot all be listed and that go far beyond gender and race. As such, the campaign would be concerned with addressing difference and inclusivity beyond the ways in which bodies are often uncritically classified as “women,” “men,” “white,” or “of color,” which would have two important effects: (1) precluding essentialist and stereotypical discourse from being so present in the campaign, and (2) escaping the paradox of inclusivity inherent to current approaches to occupational rebranding by examining all forms of difference as intertwined and no longer forcing practitioners to choose which form(s) of difference will form the basis for the campaign (e.g., gender, race), while ignoring other important socially significant differences that matter. A queer “Sit With Me”
campaign would therefore start general conversations about how “computing and I.T.” work has become problematically associated with particular forms of difference and how difference plays no role in whether anyone is more or less suited to pursue a career in this field.

Reimagining the “Sit With Me” campaign through a queer lens also entails questioning the reasons why we should care about valuing difference and inclusivity in “computing and I.T.” to begin with. As we saw in Chapters 5 and 6, the reasons invoked in unofficial campaign discourse for the need to increase the representation of women in the field often had to do with the idea that women (e.g., people who are in what are identified as female bodies) are different from men (e.g., people who are in what are identified as male bodies) and will thus bring added value to the field – or that all women are “great technical thinkers”. However, this logic rests upon essentialist notions of identity by placing all women and all men in separate categories and assuming differences between them, thereby denying the differences among women and among men that are masked by those arguments. How, then, would it be possible argue for valuing difference and inclusivity in “computing and I.T.” from a queer perspective that avoids generalization among broad categories such as “women” and “men”?

In response to the above question, one needs to consider the very aim of queer theory itself: shaking up some of our most foundational assumptions about difference. Parker (2001) goes so far as to claim that the ultimate aim
of queer theory involves “fucking things up” (p. 52) by offering alternative explanations of reality that seem radical. However, what is considered to entail “fucking things up” (M. Parker, 2001, p. 52) is very contextually dependent and has shifted dramatically throughout history. Indeed, the different feminist movements, the civil rights movement, and the gay rights movement have all resulted in shaking up some of the very foundations of society: women can now vote and work outside the home without the permission of their spouses (unthinkable at the turn of the 20th century), people in bodies that are classified as those of color are no longer relegated to the back of buses in the south (unthinkable at the beginning of the post-World War II era), and two people who are classified as being of the same sex can now get married in many countries and several states (unthinkable even as few as fifteen years ago).

To a certain extent, occupational rebranding campaigns, viewed from a queer perspective, can follow the three social movements I outlined above. Participants in these campaigns can claim loud and strong, just like participants in those social movements have, that it is just not right that occupational fields such as “computing and I.T.” are seen as being more naturally suited to some people rather than others on the basis of a given category of difference – especially because, as Butler (2007) reminds us, there are no essential features behind any of those categories anyway. Outgoing women in pink suits (and men in pink suits too – why not?) can write code
just as well as shy men in baggy shirts and scruffy beards if they have the same intellectual abilities. People can write code just as well in wheelchairs as they can in an office chair. And people who identify themselves as mixed-race can also code just as well as people who identify with only one racial group. The point is that differences related to both bodily features and discursive performances have nothing to do with one’s actual capacity to work in “computing and I.T.”. As such, people who have traditionally been viewed as unsuited to the field on the basis of differences that they embody and perform can make the case that they too belong in the field. Whereas there may be some initial resistance and discomfort related to the increased presence of multiple forms of difference in “computing and I.T.,” queer practitioners and scholars would ask: who cares? As discussed above, the purpose of queer theory is to destabilize seemingly natural assumptions. Moreover, things that seem radical today may not seem that way down the road. Through queer occupational rebranding campaigns that are undertaken today, perhaps the notion that “computing and I.T.” work is more natural for people who look and act like “nerds” will be completely debunked in twenty years – and the campaign will have effectively been successful at transforming assumptions that currently tend to be taken for granted.

Of course, it is one thing to formulate political claims through discourse and another thing to express political claims through action. Butler (2004) would thus argue that queering occupational rebranding
campaigns such as “Sit With Me” must go beyond simply formulating one’s claims in the language of the hegemony. Queer theory is much more radical than that. Thus, in addition to explicitly claiming that embodied and discursive forms of difference have nothing to do with the performance of work, one of the goals of a queer “Sit With Me” campaign would be to foster subversive performances that challenge the scripts that “computing and I.T.” workers are expected to enact in order to constitute themselves as “computing and I.T.” workers. The campaign would consequently encourage “computing and I.T.” workers to engage in a different type of drag – one that subverts rather than reifies normative discourses about what it means to work in “computing and I.T.” – in order to explicitly break any connections between embodied and discursive performances of difference and one’s ability to work in the field.

The opportunities to engage in these subversive performances are endless. There could be a “Sit With Me” video that shows “computing and I.T.” workers doing drag in ways that subvert norms about gender, sex, race, class, ability, language, and more. The red chair, which as we saw earlier is currently a central organizing element of the “Sit With Me” campaign, would be a perfect catalyst for such subversive performances. In a queer “Sit With Me” campaign, the red chair could be used as a platform for technologists to not only undo gender in “computing and I.T.”, but also undo difference, by engaging in performances that fall outside of the norms to which they are
held accountable on the basis of the identity categories that are ascribed to them (Butler, 2004; Deutsch, 2007). One example of such a performance could consist in a straight male technologist who habitually embodies and performs hegemonic masculinity doing drag as an older gay man or as a pregnant woman. This man could thus use the chair as a platform to claim that regardless of his gender performances and of any identity categories that he is ascribed, his ability to be a great technical thinker and contribute to the field of “computing and I.T.” remains the same. The red chair would thus become a symbol of why occupations in general (and “computing and I.T.” in particular) should never be considered to be a “natural” field for anyone on the basis of any given category of difference. When sitting in the chair, people would thus respond to questions such as “what is wrong with associating this field with workers who embody and perform difference in a given way?” as opposed to questions that rest upon identity categories and forms of difference that are treated discretely, such as “why am I proud to be a women in I.T.?”. The campaign would still largely be centered around discursive struggles about the chair’s meaning, but asking new questions such as those that I have formulated above has much more potential to undo associations between work and difference, which would be one of the principal aims of any queer occupational rebranding campaign.

So far, I have claimed that a queer “Sit With Me” campaign would not seek to get a particular group of people (e.g., women) into the field of
“computing and I.T.” on the basis of any category of difference, since there are no essential features behind those categories. Therefore, a major goal of such a campaign would be to disrupt the notion that embodying or performing difference in any way makes someone either more naturally suited or less apt to pursue a career in a given field. However, it is very clear that not everyone is suited to do any particular types of work. There are material aspects of work that cannot be denied and that do make occupations appeal more or less to some people. Thus, a queer occupational (de)segregation scholar would not claim that anyone can do any time of work. Rather, a queer occupational (de)segregation scholar would claim is that it is not any category of difference that gives someone the aptitude to pursue a career in any line of work and that, consequently, it doesn’t make sense to say that all women are great technical thinkers or that women will bring some special skills to a field such as “computing and I.T.”.

My above claims lead to the question: if categories of difference don’t make some people more or less suited to working in an occupation such as “computing and I.T.”, what does make people more or less suited to working in this field? To answer this question, queer scholars and practitioners of occupational rebranding would turn to empirical studies of work in the field of “computing and I.T.”, which would enable them to understand what this work really involves and what people in this field are required to do as a part of their jobs. In this regard, it should come as no surprise that empirical
studies of “computing and I.T.” demonstrate that this type of work demands technical thinking and mathematical skills. Thus, there is no question that people with a technical oriented mindset are prime candidates for “computing and I.T.” work (Kelan, 2008; Scott-Dixon, 2004). However, pursuing a career in this field requires more than simply having access to a body of technical knowledge and thought. Kelan (2008) and Scott-Dixon (2004), for instance, argue that work in “computing and I.T.” also is service work, as well as work that is often done in teams. Workers in this field thus require not only good technical skills, but also good people skills. Indeed, one of Kelan’s (2008) participants stated that there are two principal aspects to “computing and I.T.” work: “the first is the purely technical. You need to have a bit of a flair for this kind of thinking...And secondly, what is very important for my work is to deal with the customer, to make this relationship work” (p. 55).

Consequently, “while the popular perception of ICT workers is of rather asocial and solitary hackers, the ideal ICT worker is increasingly described in popular and academic literature as having both technical and emotional competencies” (Kelan, 2008, p. 50). People with both these technical and emotional competencies would thus be excellent candidates for “computing and I.T.” work, whether these people identify as women, men, white, Black, or anything else. This would result in a significant rebranding of “computing and I.T.” work since it has often been portrayed as a field where only technical thought is important and where there is no room for emotional
expression (Kelan, 2008). If the rebranding is successful, people who may have previously seen the field as unattractive on the basis of it being perceived as stoic may thus give the field a second look.

As I have mentioned several times, what is important to emphasize, from a queer perspective, is that there is no connection between difference and the technical and emotional competencies that are required to succeed in “computing and I.T.”. Whereas technical thinking is stereotypically masculine and emotional expression is stereotypically feminine, there is nothing natural about these associations (Cockburn, 1988). Many women have better technical thinking skills than men, just as many men have better emotional competencies than women. Consequently, it doesn’t make sense to say that we need more of either women or men in the field, since one’s identification as a woman or a man does not make a person a better or a worse technologist. What is important, then, is to emphasize that what “computing and I.T.” needs more of is people who have the technical skills and emotional competencies that empirical studies of “computing and I.T.” work cite as being necessary do to the job. This is why a queer “Sit With Me” campaign would emphasize the material aspects “computing and I.T.” work and rebrand the occupation as particularly well suited to the people who have the competencies that are necessary to do this type of work (or who are willing to develop these competencies), which is important considering that
many people hold the false belief that this is a field where there is no room for emotional expression or teamwork.

Clearly, more research is needed on the material aspects of “computing and I.T.” work before a rebranding campaign based upon these aspects could be envisioned. Indeed, there is a dearth of literature that addresses the particularities of technical workplaces and what competencies and skills this work really entails. Scholars of occupational (de)segregation would thus have a vested interest in conducting ethnographies of occupations and noting not only the cultural, but the material aspects of work. However, a campaign such as “Sit With Me” could also reach out to people already working in the field and ask them to elaborate on what it takes to be successful in “computing and I.T.”. – and why not ask them to do so when they are sitting in a material artifact such as the red chair? Focusing upon the material features of work in this way would have at least two important benefits: (1) explicitly bringing actual work practices and the material aspects of work back into the organizational literature, as advocated by a number of organizational theorists (e.g., K. L. Ashcraft, 2013; Barley & Kunda, 2001) and (2) avoiding problematic claims that on the basis of one’s identification as a “woman” or a “man”, they have particular skills that are needed in a given occupation (e.g., we need women in the field because women, in general, are great technical thinkers).
Above, I’ve claimed that a queer “Sit With Me” campaign wouldn’t address difference explicitly and would instead focus on the material aspects of “computing and I.T.” work that will make the field appeal to some people and not others, regardless of categories of difference. Certainly, some feminist theorists have cautioned that evacuating any stable notion of “difference” from a campaign such as “Sit With Me” would arrest the potential of group identity politics and deny how groups of people who are grouped into socially significant categories, such as women, are marginalized in occupations such as “computing and I.T.” (e.g., Collins, 2008a; Gunnarsson, 2011; hooks, 1989; Nussbaum, 2004; Smith, 2008). Consequently, they would claim that not explicitly addressing any social identities or forms of difference in an occupational rebranding campaign denies important inequalities between people on the basis of their ascription to a given category of difference. However, queer theorists such as Butler (2007) refute that argument by claiming that instead, clinging to stable categories of identity, such as women, “denies the internal complexity and indeterminancy of the term and constitutes itself only through the exclusion of some part of the constituency that it simultaneously seeks to represent” (p. 194). As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, she also claims that “the theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and able-bodiedness invariably close with an embarrassed ‘etc.’ at the end of the list” and subsequently asks “what political impetus is to be derived from
the exasperated ‘etc.’ that so often occurs at the end of such lines?” (Butler, 2007, p. 196). As such, from a queer perspective, the politics of occupational rebranding campaigns such as “Sit With Me” are even more powerful when they deconstruct categories that are seen as foundational (e.g., women) and claim that these categories have nothing to do with one’s ability to succeed in a given line of work. Consequently, queering “Sit With Me” would entail shifting the focus from the seemingly foundational category of “women” to the material aspects of “computing and I.T.” work, since no category of difference makes an individual more or less apt to have what it takes to work in this field.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, one tension within the queer framework that I have adopted in this dissertation is that queer theory is concerned with destabilizing taken-for-granted assumptions – not to facilitate any pragmatic goal. Much queer research has thus been critiqued for being too abstract and, consequently, not useful to practitioners that are concerned with finding solutions to real-world problems. However, a queer framework is helpful for reminding theorists and practitioners to avoid being overly opportunistic by focusing on the ends and not the means. Indeed, queer theorists would not be particularly concerned about the possibility that dissociating occupational identities from particular forms of difference may end up devaluing any given occupation, as they would counter that the means are more important than the end and that what is most important is to disrupt the idea that some
people do better work than others on the sole basis of forms of difference that they embody or perform. Similarly, a queer occupational rebranding campaign would never be based on what I outlined earlier as the business case for diversity. Nevertheless, businesses could very well benefit from adopting a queer approach since deconstructing taken-for-granted assumptions and encouraging the expression of multiple forms of difference can foster not only innovative ideas, but a healthier workplace environment. Moreover, both technology companies and the field of “computing and I.T.” as a whole could be losing valuable talent because of the association with this work with difference instead of being associated with the skills and qualities that make good technologists, such as being a good technical thinker and working well in a team. A queer campaign could thus be seen as benefiting businesses because it seeks to market an occupation to people who have the skills and qualities that are needed in this occupation, as opposed to a heterogeneous people grouped into a broad identity category that may or may not have the skills, qualities, and interests that will make them good technologists.

Concretely though, what tangible results might we see from queering occupational desegregation efforts in the context of the “Sit With Me” campaign? One thing that is clear is that these tangible results would look different than what the campaign has thus far been trying to achieve: increasing the percentage of women who work in “computing and I.T.”.
Because the “target audience” of the campaign would no longer be women, but anyone who has the skills and qualities that are needed in the field of “computing and I.T.”, the campaign would be successful if it generates more excitement about the field and more people who are great technical thinkers are entering it. That is, enrollments in computer science courses would be up across the country. Technology companies would have fewer difficulties filling vacancies because there are more qualified people in their pool of candidates. And the new people who are now pursuing technical careers would stay in the field for two reasons: (1) the field suits them on the basis of their interests and qualities, and (2) the field is no longer associated with a glass slipper image that portrays certain forms of difference as being more naturally suited to a career in this field. Put differently, the “computing and I.T.” would be associated with the tasks and practices that technologists do rather than with any given glass slipper image. When queered, “Sit With Me” thus wouldn’t be concerned with how many people who represent any particular group work in a field such as “computing and I.T.”; rather it would be concerned with getting more people who have what it takes to contribute to the field to enter it. Given that many people who identify as women do, in fact, have the skills and qualities that the field needs, more women would also be entering the field. However, the increasing numbers of women in the field would be seen as a secondary effect, since the campaign would primarily be concerned with getting people who would make good technologists to enter
the field regardless of any identity category that they may be ascribed and many “women” would make good technologists.

In addition, the success of a queer “Sit With Me” campaign would be manifested in everyday discursive practices that no longer associate any glass slipper image with the field of “computing and I.T.”. Consequently, we would know that the campaign has succeeded when people who identify as women are not told that they “code well for a girl”. When people are not dismissed for not being a good fit because they don’t fit any given glass slipper norm. When individuals aren’t tokenized and seen as “resources” to organizations on the basis of a form of difference that they embody or perform. When people who currently work in “computing and I.T.” respond positively to qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys on organizational climate. And, most importantly, when the glass slipper that paints the ideal, abstract worker in “computing and I.T.” as antisocial white men who identify as nerds, geeks and hackers is shattered into pieces (Clarke Hayes, 2010b). Whereas no one campaign can achieve all of that in every technical workplace, just as no one campaign can achieve gender parity in “computing and I.T.”, the queer “Sit With Me” campaign that I reconstructed above would certainly help efforts to achieve many of those goals by putting the “work” of “computing and I.T.” at the center and breaking any connections between difference and work practices.
Of course, I have reconstructed the “Sit With Me” campaign only in one way and there are multiple ways in which the campaign could be reconstructed from a queer perspective. However, I have argued that a queer approach to an occupational rebranding campaign such as “Sit With Me” would follow these general principles: (1) the campaign considers all forms of difference as being intertwined and inseparable rather than as discrete; (2) the campaign’s avowed purpose is to destabilize taken-for-granted assumptions about people embodying and performing difference in a given way being more naturally suited to “computing and I.T.” work; (3) the campaign seeks to separate difference from work in all of its forms, and (4) the “work” of “computing and I.T.” would be at the center of the campaign and the target audience would be anyone who has the qualities and skills that would make them good technologists, regardless of difference and identity categories. I have developed this approach to propose an alternative to current practices that seek to get more female bodies into “computing and I.T.” rather than anyone who is a great technical thinker.

In this section, I have reimagined how the “Sit With Me” campaign could be if it were to be informed by the queer approach to occupational rebranding that I outlined earlier in this chapter. The queer approach to “Sit With Me” is vastly different from the ways in which the “Sit With Me” campaign has currently been designed and executed, as well as from dominant approaches to occupational (de)segregation research. In the next
section of this chapter, I discuss the contributions of my approach to queering occupational (de)segregation and rebranding.

The Contributions of a Queer Approach to Occupational Rebranding

As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, there exists a rich interdisciplinary literature on the phenomenon of occupational (de)segregation. Although this research is very diverse and adopts multiple metatheoretical perspectives, there is one constant throughout this literature: identity categories are reified rather than deconstructed. Analyses of segregation are thus based upon predetermined identity categories around social identities such as sex and race, such as “women” and “men” (e.g., Branch, 2011; Charles & Grusky, 2004; Kaufman, 2010; McCall, 2001; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). Even a recent book that purports to examine inequalities in the labor market uses only four categories as its units of analysis, as if these categories were all encompassing, discrete, and objectively identifiable: “women”, “men”, “white”, and “Black” (Branch, 2011). The implicit, and sometimes explicit, assumption of this research is thus that achieving gender and race parity in currently segregated occupations should be the goal to which we work towards. This goal has been adopted by organizations such as NCWIT. Indeed, when NCWIT was founded, its explicit goal was to achieve “50/50 by 2020”; that is, women and men will each represent 50% of all workers in the field of “computing and I.T.” by the year 2020. From this perspective, the only problem that we need to solve is the
lack of female bodies in the currently male-dominated field of “computing and I.T.”.

In this dissertation, I have sought to expose the problematic thinking behind such assumptions and advocate a way of addressing occupational (de)segregation that is rooted in queer theory and that does not rely upon fixed categories of identity or essentialist discourse about groups such as “women” or “men”. By doing so, I have made the following contributions to extant occupational (de)segregation research and practice: (1) exposing the paradox of inclusivity which is inherent to current ways of addressing occupational (de)segregation, and (2) articulating a queer approach to occupational (de)segregation research and practice that enables scholars and practitioners to avert the paradox of inclusivity that they currently run into. Below, I elaborate more on each of these contributions and discuss how my findings significantly advance the current conversation about occupational (de)segregation.

**Major Contribution #1: Exposing the Paradox of Inclusivity**

One of the most important contributions that I have made to the current conversation on occupational (de)segregation in this dissertation has been to expose the paradox of inclusivity that surrounds not only the “Sit With Me” campaign, but current approaches to occupational rebranding in general. This paradox stems from categorical thinking and the assumption that we can best way of addressing difference is to name specific categories
around which it can be organized. For instance, the “Sit With Me” campaign has been organized around the categories of “women” and “men”. However, my intersectional analysis of the campaign’s discourse in Chapter 6 exposed many other socially significant forms of difference that matter in “computing and I.T.” work but that the campaign’s reliance on the categories of “women” and “men” prevent it from addressing: race, sexuality, ability status, language, class, and occupational alignment. Moreover, the forms of difference that I identified are not the only ones that matter and because differences are often closeted, explicitly naming all differences that matter in any given occupational context is not possible. To do so would also imply that identity categories can be used as discrete categories of analysis, despite that forms of difference are always experienced simultaneously. Relying upon identity categories, as the “Sit With Me” campaign does, thus produces discourse that makes broad claims about heterogeneous groups of people without considering how people who are grouped into such categories experience privilege and/or disadvantage in vastly different ways. Moreover, as I showed through my analysis in Chapter 5, organizing occupational rebranding campaigns around identity categories such as “women” is bound to lead the campaign to producing essentialist discourse about people on the basis of these categories, even if the official campaign materials do not do so.

My contribution of exposing the paradox of inclusivity that surrounds current occupational (de)segregation discourse is original in important ways.
Most notably, it’s original in that I am the first scholar of occupational (de)segregation to expose the problems with categorical thinking and to consequently advocate addressing the ways in which work is organized around difference without attending to identity categories and avoiding categorical thought about difference. Thus, even though some scholars have claimed that the way to avoid essentialism in occupational (de)segregation research is to include multiple categories of identity in one’s analysis, I have shown, through my analysis in both Chapters 5 and Chapter 6, that even an intersectional framework is problematic because it continues to push us to make broad claims about heterogeneous groups of people and because it still forces both scholars and practitioners to choose between addressing some socially significant forms of difference but not others. Indeed, my analysis of the “Sit With Me” campaign’s discourse showed that even when a group of actors attempts to evacuate essentialist discourse from an occupational rebranding campaign, as prominent actors on the campaign team did, the campaign will still inevitably generate essentialist discourse if it is organized around stable identity categories such as “women” and “men”. This dissertation thus advances the occupational rebranding conversation from its current state of “let’s organize a campaign around identity categories” to “let’s think about how we can desegregate and rebrand occupations without having recourse to identity categories and making broad claims about heterogeneous groups of people.” But how is it possible to do so? The answer lies within the
second major contribution that I make in this dissertation, which I discuss below: showing how adopting a queer approach to occupational rebranding can enable scholars and practitioners to escape the paradox of inclusivity that they currently face.

**Major Contribution #2: Escaping the Paradox of Inclusivity**

In this dissertation, I have done more than simply point out a problem in current approaches to occupational rebranding; I have developed a new approach to engage in this practice that enables scholars and practitioners to escape the paradox of inclusivity that I have identified. The queer approach to occupational rebranding that I have developed is thus the second major contribution that I have made in this dissertation.

One of the contributions of the queer approach that I have developed is that it seeks to separate work from difference in all of its forms. This advances the current conversation, which I have shown is based on the assumption that we only need to reconfigure the way in which work is organized around difference, as opposed to shattering any and all associations between work and difference. The “Sit With Me” campaign’s discourse, for instance, overwhelmingly makes the case that women are good technologists – not that identifiable categories of difference (such as “women”) do not play a role in determining whether someone has the skills, competencies, and interests to pursue a career. The queer approach to occupational rebranding that I have developed is thus the first that
encourages scholars and practitioners to explicitly challenge all associations between difference and work practices.

The queer approach to occupational rebranding that I have developed also advances the current conversation in that it brings actual work practices to the center of rebranding discourse. This is an important contribution, as current approaches to occupational rebranding has tended to not only largely ignore the material aspects of work, but assume that everyone who is grouped into a given identity category is well suited to work in a given field. The common “Sit With Me” phrase that “women are good technical thinkers” is a prime example of this. Not all women are good technical thinkers (nor are men), but many are. The queer approach that I have developed thus proposes to transform rebranding discourse so that it emphasizes that embodying a particular form of difference does not make a person a good technical thinker. This would encourage all good technical thinkers, regardless of whether or not they fit the current glass slipper image of “computing and I.T.” workers or whether they identify as “women”, “men”, or something else, to consider a career in “computing and I.T.”. A campaign such as “Sit With Me” would therefore be successful not when there are more women in a “computing and I.T.”, but when excitement is generated about the field and more great technical thinkers are entering it. But of course, there is much more to “computing and I.T.” work than technical thinking that the campaign’s discourse would emphasize. For instance, emotional
competencies and social skills are also important (Kelan, 2008; Scott-Dixon, 2004). The campaign’s discourse would thus also attempt to disrupt stereotypes of the field according to which there is no room for teamwork or emotional expression in “computing and I.T.”, which once again has the potential to get people who do not currently fit the glass slipper image of “computing and I.T.” workers to consider a career in this field.

The queer approach to occupational rebranding that I have outlined has important implications for practitioners working to foster inclusivity in fields that are deemed to be segregated. Indeed, queer occupational rebranding campaigns would encourage diversity practitioners to think about all of the different ways in which occupations can be segregated and to claim again and again that work and difference, in all of its forms, must be dissociated. Thus, when adopting the queer approach that I have outlined, practitioners will not exclusively focus their efforts on the number of particular types of bodies in a given line of work. Consequently, queer occupational rebranding campaigns would thus not limit their goal to “we need to increase the representation of women in this field by x%”; rather, the goal is to challenge all of the ways in which work is organized around difference in a given field. Moreover, foregrounding work practices, as the queer approach to occupational rebranding that I have developed advocates, is a powerful way to work towards separating work from difference without actually having recourse to identity categories and making generalizations
within them. A queer approach to occupational rebranding thus makes the contribution of deconstructing, rather than reifying, any given form of difference, in addition to bringing actual work practices to the forefront of occupational rebranding campaigns. Consequently, queering occupational rebranding campaigns enables practitioners to address occupational (de)segregation in much more complex and sophisticated ways than current approaches to this phenomenon allow.

I have shown in this section that rethinking occupational rebranding through queer theory makes important contributions to extant research on occupational (de)segregation, as it provides researchers and practitioners new ways to conceive of the relationship between difference, work, and communication. Because queer theory has generally been kept out of occupational (de)segregation research and practice, there are many ways in which queer approaches to occupational (de)segregation can be developed in future research. In the following section of this chapter, I discuss some of the ways in which future research could further develop the approach to occupational (de)segregation and rebranding that I have outlined above.

**The Road Ahead**

Bringing queer theory into the occupational (de)segregation literature provides scholars and practitioners with new ways of conceptualizing this phenomenon. Because this dissertation is the first attempt to queer occupational (de)segregation and rebranding, a significant amount of
research remains to be done to further explore how queer theory can inform occupational (de)segregation and rebranding research and practice. In addition, future research can also explore how queer theory can inform difference research in organizational communication even beyond occupational (de)segregation and rebranding. Here, I propose two different avenues that can extend the queer approach to difference and occupational rebranding that I have outlined in this dissertation: (1) conducting ethnographic studies of occupational (de)segregation that are informed by queer theory; and (2) rethinking organizational communication theories about difference through the lens of queer theory.

Queer Informed Ethnographic Studies of Occupational (De)Segregation Processes

Although qualitative studies of occupational (de)segregation have been emerging, these qualitative studies tend to conceptualize difference in the same way as quantitative studies; that is, as fixed and stable. Qualitative occupational (de)segregation research, including research on rebranding, has yet to deconstruct difference and identity categories such as “women” and “men.” Furthermore, occupational (de)segregation research has yet to examine inclusivity as a communicative, interactional accomplishment rather than as only related to particular types of bodies. Here, I propose that queer-informed ethnographic studies of occupational (de)segregation and rebranding merit the attention of both scholars and practitioners in order to
deconstruct forms of difference, simultaneously analyze multiple forms of difference, and examine how occupational segregation is created and sustained not only through bodies, but through discursive practices.

The ultimate goal of queer informed ethnographic studies of occupational (de)segregation and rebranding would be to examine the ways in which difference – in all of its embodied and discursive forms – is associated with who works in a given occupation (or, at the very least, who is seen as “natural workers” in an occupation). These studies would thus provide a fresh alternative to occupational (de)segregation research that assumes that the only differences that matter are related to bodily features and that forms of difference are separate, rather than intertwined. This is especially important because fitting into a given occupation is not just about having the right body, but about engaging in the right discursive practices that mark individuals as full-fledged occupational members.

Future queer ethnographic studies of occupational (de)segregation and rebranding would treat difference as fluid and all encompassing, rather than as related to one particular bodily feature. As such, queer researchers would find that not all people who identify as women necessarily find occupations such as “computing and I.T.” hostile and that not all men construct a hostile occupational culture. Segregation, then, can be conceptualized in terms of the numbers of people with particular bodily features in a given occupation.
but also in terms of the discursive practices through which people engage to fit into occupations.

In sum, future ethnographic studies that adopt a queer lens to occupational (de)segregation and rebranding would have the following characteristics: (1) they treat difference as fluid and constantly evolving, thus avoiding generalizations among people who are placed into a particular social group; (2) they examine difference as related to both bodily features and discursive performances; and (3) they examine all differences as intertwined and as inseparable. Future studies that follow these principles will undoubtedly shed important new insights on how occupations are organized around difference, broadly defined.

Re-Thinking “Difference” in Organizational Communication Through Queer Theory

As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, queer theory is largely absent from extant organizational communication research that examines difference. Indeed, the majority of this research adopts a social constructionist approach, thus assuming that although sex, gender, and other facets of identity are relatively arbitrary labels that have been created by society, these categories are nevertheless stable and appear real. One of the important contributions of my study has therefore been to show how queer theory provides an alternative lens through which difference can be conceptualized by viewing identities as fluid and shifting.
This new way of conceptualizing difference, rooted in queer theory, enables us to rethink existing theories of difference in organizational life. For instance, in this chapter, I have queered glass slipper theory by arguing that occupations are not just constructed to fit particular bodies rather than others, but also certain identity discursive performances rather than others. The focus on discursive performances prevents intra-group generalizations by always viewing difference as fluid and multifaceted (e.g., not just related to sex).

Future research that uses queer theory as a lens to rethink other existing theories about difference and organization would be invaluable to account for how difference is constructed not just through bodily features, but also through discursive performances. One particular theory that could be queered is the longstanding feminist notion of the glass ceiling that women are said to face in organizational settings. The glass ceiling is a term that captures how women who seek to rise to higher management and administrative positions in organization are met with a barrier that is difficult to surpass (Buzzanell, 1995). Queering the glass ceiling would entail deconstructing the category “women” in order to investigate how the glass ceiling is actually related to multiple configurations of difference that are much more complex than looking at “women” discretely.

Another glass metaphor that could be queered is the notion of the glass escalator, a term coined by Williams (1992, 1995). As stated earlier in this
dissertation, the glass escalator is a term used to capture how men in female-dominated occupations tend to get pushed onto a fast track to higher positions of power, often without even trying. Although most glass escalator research has focused exclusively on sex, Wingfield (2009) recently made the important contribution of racializing the glass escalator by showing that Black men do not tend to benefit from the glass escalator in the same way that white men do. Queering the glass escalator would add the contribution of accounting for how the glass escalator is tied not just to bodies, but to the ways in which individuals perform various facets of difference. Thus, to queer the glass escalator would be to make fluid the categories of “men,” “women,” “white,” and “Black” that have tended to be taken for granted in this line of research.

Above, I have presented a number of theories about difference and organization that could be reexamined through the lens of queer theory to shed new insights about the multiple and complex ways in which difference matters in organizational life. However, considering that queer theory is just now starting to gain traction in mainstream organizational research, there exist many theories of organizational life that remain to be reexamined through a queer lens. Queering these organizational theories will ultimately lead us to new ways of thinking about the relationship between organization, communication, and difference.
Final Reflections

Admittedly, when I began this project almost three years ago, I knew relatively little about queer theory. I knew that I was interested in the phenomenon of occupational segregation and how NCWIT, through its “Sit With Me” campaign, was attempting to get more women into “computing and I.T.”. Because of my personal and scholarly commitments to social justice and because I view occupational segregation as a case of social injustice, I accepted that NCWIT’s efforts to get more women into “computing and I.T.” work were necessary without a lot of critical reflection.

Today, I still very much believe that NCWIT is doing important work and I am proud to have been part of a dynamic team that is seeking to make “computing and I.T.” more inclusive. However, my prospectus defense served as an instigator to get me to examine NCWIT’s mission more critically and rethink the ways in which I identify with it. A committee member, Bryan Taylor, asked a relatively banal question, but that ended up dramatically shaping the direction that my project was heading: “What type of feminist are you?” Because I believe that gender must always be regarded alongside other forms of difference, that gender identities (and other identities) are shaped by larger societal discourses, and that it is important to avoid making broad generalizations across forms of difference, I responded that I identified primarily as a poststructuralist feminist (Scott, 1988). Bryan then told me that he didn’t believe me, a comment that I first found surprising (and, I’ll
admit, scary), but that I quickly came to understand. I recognize now that I was supporting a liberal feminist philosophy while claiming a poststructuralist feminist identity. I thus had to find a way of reconciling an important metatheoretical tension in my project: how can I believe in the importance of getting more women into “computing and I.T.” work, which is incontestably first and foremost a liberal feminist concern (Mumby, 2013; Wood, 2013), with the poststructuralist feminist scholarly identity that I had spent so many years creating for myself?

After months of thought, I realized that I did believe in NCWIT's mission of increasing “gender diversity” in “computing and I.T.,” but that this belief did not necessarily make me a liberal feminist because I view “gender diversity” in a different way than it is discussed in most official NCWIT texts. For instance, I see gender diversity as not just related to female bodies; after all, the very concept of gender refers to cultural performances of masculinity and femininity rather than to “women” and “men” (R. W. Connell, 1987, 1995; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Drawing from intersectional theory, I also believe that the concept of gender difference cannot be examined without considering other forms of difference (Allen, 2011).

After becoming better acquainted with queer theory for another research project (J. McDonald, 2013a), I began to think about how occupational segregation could be studied through the concept of sheer difference (M. Parker, 2001; Parker, 2002) in order to avoid relying heavily
upon seemingly fixed categories and making broad intra-group generalizations. In particular, I saw how queer theory and its notion of sheer difference would debunk the assumptions that it is only important to get more women into “computing and I.T.” and that all women will bring something special to the field that no man can bring. This led me to developing the queer approach to occupational rebranding that I have outlined and advocated in this dissertation. The queer approach that I have developed enables me to argue that NCWIT’s work is important because they are working towards making “computing and I.T.” more inclusive of difference along the lines of sex, but that NCWIT’s project of increasing the number of female bodies in “computing and I.T.” should be queered and work towards dissociating “computing and I.T.” work from difference in all of its forms. I thus claim that through the queer approach to occupational rebranding that I’ve developed, researchers and practitioners can avoid making generalizations within broad categories of difference such as “women” and instead emphasize that broad categories of difference play no role in one’s ability to pursue a career in any given field.

I believe that understanding difference in organizational and occupational life through the lens of queer theory provides us with sophisticated and useful tools to capture the nuances and complexities of the relationship between these three concepts. However, I certainly recognize the limits of putting a queer approach to occupational rebranding into
practice. Several participants told me that one of the very reasons that NCWIT has been able to secure financial support from both companies and public research agencies is that the word “women” is in the title. Moreover, in everyday public discourse, identity categories are constantly reified. People make generalizations within categories of difference all the time in order to better understand and organize the complex world in which we live. As such, there is no guarantee that any organization could secure funding for a “Sit With Me” campaign developed through the lens of queer theory. There is also no guarantee that such a campaign would have as much resonance with the greater public as the current campaign has. After all, as I showed in Chapter 5, the essentialist and stereotypical discourse that surrounded the “Sit With Me” campaign was not in the campaign’s official texts, but in the ways in which the campaign audience discussed the campaign. Furthermore, rebranding campaigns can never be controlled by the individuals who develop them and there is thus no way of guaranteeing that essentialist discourse would not creep into the so-called queer campaign, or that people wouldn’t ridicule the way in which the campaign participants engage in subversive drag performances in order to denaturalize taken-for-granted assumptions about identity and difference.

However, to conclude this dissertation with a glimmer of hope, the idea that women should be able to vote, that people of color can use the same restrooms as white people, and that a man can get married to another man
were all once considered radical ideas. Similarly, whereas the idea that people can exercise any occupation regardless of the forms of difference that they embody and perform may seem radical today given the state of occupational segregation in labor markets around the world, perhaps this idea may not seem so radical so far down the road – especially if we are able, as a society, to adopt a queer perspective to the ways that we think of and that perform difference in organizational and occupational life.

Consequently, there is no reason to not try to fight against the structures (including funding agencies) that prevent us from having these important conversations, just like women, people of color, LGBT people, and their allies have fought against structures that seemed like they could never change.

Already today, we can start to ask which women and which men we are referring to when we discuss difference at work (K. L. Ashcraft, 2011) – and also conceptualize difference beyond bodies to recognize that difference is also very much about discursive performances and everyday interactions. These types of conversations would foster more nuanced conversations about difference in organizational life, as well as more complex ways to understand how workplace inequalities are constituted. Ultimately then, these conversations would enable us to think about how we can seek to curb workplace inequalities related to difference in all of the forms that difference manifests itself – and these conversations can thus be an important precursor
for working towards and achieving social justice in contemporary organizational life.
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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

The (Re-)branding of Occupational Identities in Knowledge-Intensive Fields
James McDonald, M.Sc.
Principal Investigator

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM
December, 2010

Please read the following material that explains this research study. Signing this form will indicate that you have been informed about the study and that you want to participate. We want you to understand what you are being asked to do and what risks and benefits—if any—are associated with the study. This should help you decide whether or not you want to participate in the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

You are being asked to take part in a research project conducted by James McDonald, a graduate student in the University of Colorado at Boulder’s Department of Communication, 270 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309. This project is being done under the direction of and conjointly with Professor Karen Lee Ashcraft, Department of Communication, 270 UCB, Boulder, CO, 80309. James can be reached at (phone number deleted). Professor Ashcraft can be reached at (phone number deleted).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This research study is being conducted to learn more about how the National Center for Women and Technology (NCWIT) is attempting to increase diversity in the field of information technology. You are being asked to take part in this study because of your relationship to NCWIT, either as a staff member, a board member, a member of the Executive Advisory Committee, a participant at NCWIT’s annual summit, or a participant in one of NCWIT’s outreach programs. Approximately sixty-five participants will be invited to participate in this research study.
Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you don't want to. You may also leave the study at any time. If you leave the study before it is finished, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Description of Procedures
If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview in which you will be asked a series of questions.

Description of Interview Questions
You will be asked questions about your relationship to NCWIT and about NCWIT's attempts to increase diversity in the information technology field. We anticipate that the most sensitive topics discussed could be how you perceive NCWIT's attempts to increase diversity in the information technology field.

Time Commitment
Participating should take between 45 and 90 minutes of your time, depending on how much information you would like to discuss.

Research Location
Participation will take place at a location of your choice, such as your office, the researcher's office, or a local coffee shop.

Audio Recordings
Participation in this research may include audio-taping. These recordings will be transcribed and will be retained until the data is reported in research publications. Those individuals who will have access to these tapes will be James McDonald and Professor Ashcraft.

Being audio-taped is not a requirement for participation. You may still participate in the study should you choose not be taped.

Risks and Discomforts
There are some minimal risks if you take part in this study. Minor emotional and/or psychological risks are possible when you discuss your relationship to NCWIT's attempts to increase diversity in the information technology field. The probability of these risks is low and the duration of these risks is expected to last no longer than the length of the interview.
BENEFITS

The benefit of being in this study is the opportunity to reflect on the practices by which NCWIT is attempting to increase diversity within the information technology field. By participating in the study, you therefore have the opportunity to learn more about these practices and their consequences.

ENDING YOUR PARTICIPATION

You have the right to withdraw your consent or stop participating at any time. You have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) or refuse to participate in any procedure for any reason. Refusing to participate in this study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

We will make every effort to maintain the privacy of your data. All written notes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s office and all interview and observational data will be stored on a secure, password protected computer. Your name will not be directly connected to your interview answers. Pseudonyms will be used when data is presented in publication to ensure confidentiality and your position will not be listed if you are the only person with such a position. If you consent to the interview being audio recorded, the recording will be destroyed upon the final reporting of data in research publications.

Other than the researchers, only regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections and the University of Colorado at Boulder Institutional Review Board may see your individual data as part of routine audits.

QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions regarding your participation in this research, you should ask the investigator before signing this form. If you should have questions or concerns during or after your participation, please contact James McDonald at (801) 634-9192.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, any concerns regarding this project or any dissatisfaction with any aspect of this study, you may report them -- confidentially, if you wish -- to the Institutional Review Board, 3100 Marine Street, Rm A15, 563 UCB, (303) 735-3702.
AUTHORIZATION

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I know the possible risks and benefits. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study. I know that I can withdraw at any time. I have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 3 pages.

Name of Participant (printed) __________________________________________

Signature of Participant ___________________________ Date ______________.
(Also initial all pages of the consent form.)

I am consenting to be audio-taped during the participation of this research. 
_____ Yes, I would like to be taped during my participation in this research. 
_____ No, I would not like to be taped during my participation in this research.
Letter of Agreement

December 4th, 2016

Dear James McDonnell and Professor Askraft,

I am familiar with your research project titled “The (Re-)Producing of Occupational Identities in Knowledge-Intensive Fields” and your desire to have the National Center for Women and Information Technology (NCWIT) involved with it. I understand the role of NCWIT to be a resource to learn more about the communicative processes through which occupational identities are created and transformed. I understand that you would like to attend some of our meetings and events, as well as speak with some of our staff members and with any relevant individuals in our organizational network about their role in creating and transforming occupational identities. At some of the meetings that you attend, we may also decide to provide you with documents that are distributed, provided that you agree to respect any requests we make that some documents be kept confidential. In your research reports, you may use the name “NCWIT” (i.e., an organizational pseudonym is not required), provided that you do not reveal any information that could enable someone to be traced back to particular individuals.

I am satisfied that the safety and welfare of NCWIT’s staff members and other members of its network are adequately protected as described in the research protocol. In addition, I understand that this research will be carried out following sound ethical principles and that involvement in this research, for NCWIT, its staff members, and the members of its organizational network, is strictly voluntary and guarantees the protection of participant’s privacy. In particular, I understand that the investigator cannot provide me with data that might allow anyone other than the research team to identify anyone’s answers unless permission has been specifically given by the subject. NCWIT, its staff members, and any relevant members of its organizational network understand that, if anything, they expect in return for participation in this research.

Therefore, as a representative of NCWIT, I agree to allow you to conduct your research at our agency/institution.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Lucy Sanders
Chief Executive Officer
National Center for Women and Information Technology
Lucinda.Sanders@colorado.edu
303-725-2108