Noting the ever-increasing encroachment of discourses and practices from the private sector on public education providers, this paper argues that such organizations exist within competing sets of differences that seek to define and fix the meaning of 'education' and 'business'. We report on fieldwork conducted in an adult education college in Sydney. In the Australian context these colleges are referred to as community colleges and their history is one based in a strong liberal tradition. Utilising Judith Butler's idea of 'drag' we consider the effects of changing modes of governance in the college with specific reference to the stories told to us about it. Our discussion suggests that the organisation was caught between identifying itself with a masculinised discourse of business and a discourse of community cast as its feminised other. In navigating between these, the college was seen to perform as a 'drag king' — an organisation performing the masculine but in so doing, undoing its gendered status. This leads us to suggest that the incorporation of business and market-based discourse into the management of community education is something that is actively resisted and undermined through such forms of gendered transgression. We conclude by proposing that this organization's capacity to perform drag is a contributing factor to its overall success, and particularly in an economic climate where many not-for-profit organisations are floundering.

**Introduction**

Education is a basic right, that education is good in itself, that it contributes to the fabric of society and its attainment is a worthwhile lifelong pursuit.
This statement is taken from the public documents of an adult education college in Sydney, Australia. In an Australian context these organisations, known locally as community colleges, have emerged from a strong liberal tradition: a heritage that continues to influence these colleges' contemporary provision. Yet, for many, such a statement might seem like an anachronism of a long-deceased welfare state. Now, we are told, education should and must, operate like a business. Indeed for some decades educational institutions have been under pressure to adopt what some call 'new managerialism' (Exworthy and Halford, 1998; Pollitt, 1993). These changes have seen the governance of public educational institutions come to take on forms adopted and adapted from the private sector. With the differences between public and private sector organisations increasingly blurred, public organisations have come to be managed based on a valorisation of management methods taken from private business, and a trust in market-based forms of organising (Hood, 1995). This globalization of business and management has been said to usher in a 'transnational business masculinity' that is increasingly widespread and powerful (Connell, 1998; Connell and Wood, 2005).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, market-based ideologies permeated into all organisational domains that had hitherto never been considered in terms of markets (Marginson, 1997). The attendant forms of dominant organisational identities and management practices followed. For public institutions this has meant the creation of new expectations by funding bodies and by 'customers'. These changes provide a 'strong plot' that seeks to inform the practice of organizations. It does so in that it provides an overarching narrative structure that intends not only to describe the changes that have occurred and make sense out of them, but also to prospectively and normatively illustrate the transition from the past to the future — it is a 'blueprint for the management of meaning in organizations' (Czarniawska and Rhodes, 2006, p.195). With this blueprint the categories of 'business' and 'education' are mobilised through narrative as normative attempts to secure the meaning of universities, colleges, schools and all manner of educational organisations.

The paper is focused on an examination, not on the overarching discourse of new managerialism, but rather on its practical effects in one particular site — an adult community education (ACE) college in New South Wales. We draw on empirical material gathered from fieldwork conducted in one particular adult community college located in Sydney. In so doing we focus on the encroachment of business-based management practices and explore how this fuelled a form of agency tending towards the simultaneous incorporation and transgression of them. We suggest that while business discourse is very much present and accounted for, the experiential reality of encountering it is one that lacks the 'narrative closure' of the managerialist plot. That is to say while managerialism might present itself so as to instantiate a 'feeling of finality that is generated when all the questions saliently posed by the narrative are answered' (Carroll, 2007, p. 1), in practice these questions remain very open.

What we demonstrate with our case study is that forms of management associated with business and private sector organisations are valorised as male, at the expense of a feminised version of community and education. Hence, the task we set ourselves with this paper is to theorise the practical effects of managerialism in education as a process of gendered organisational change in a manner that both challenges the valorisation of masculinity and troubles the binary gender distinctions on which it is based. While agreeing in general that all organisations are integrally and invisibly cast in terms of gender (Hearn, Sheppard et al. 1989), what we found through our fieldwork at this site was that a key interpretive structure that people used to discuss their understanding of the college was between it being both a
community organisation or a business organisation — the former being characterised in relation to the feminine, the latter in relation to the masculine. To provide an explanation of this, we propose that this organisation was continually engaged in a 'drag' performance. For example, it performs 'business' when necessary and is able to 'lip synch' government agendas for the audience that desires them. Moreover, it is able to 'change its tune' and do 'community organisation' when required as well.

We draw on Butler's discussion of 'drag' (e.g. 1993, 1999, 2004) as the central concept that drives our thinking. The name 'drag' is commonly used to describe a performer dressed in the clothing of the 'opposite' sex (i.e. a 'drag show') — even though the performances themselves often undermine such binary distinctions. When the biological gender is male then 'she' (the performer) is a drag queen. When the biological gender is female, then 'he' is a drag king. Drag queens and kings are often entertainers or performers, for example in comedy or cabaret. Such performances are commonly satirical and include styles such as stand-up comedy and lip-synching of popular songs. Moreover, the meaning of such drag performances derives from the way that drag artists play with and subvert gender roles and stereotypes.

Studying organisations as being gendered involves a consideration of them in terms of the '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). In organisations, gendered discourse commonly works to valorise those institutions and practices 'that are associated with men and masculinity at the expense of others that are associated with women and femininity' (Marchand and Runyan, 2000, p. 12). Bringing drag to bear on a discussion of the management of educational organisations adds complexity to this, however, because it is a way of examining how gendered culture (built as it is on the binary and hierarchical structuring of the masculine and the feminine) can be undermined. Moreover, if education, as a central element of western culture, is not immune from a gendered identity (Sedgwick, 1990) that can be cast in a language of sexual difference and sexual relations, then taking drag as a central analytical concept might assist in understanding educational organisations from a gendered perspective that resists a privileging of the masculine.

In discussing our research at the college, we do not suggest that the organisation's performance is one that attempts to trick or deceive, but like a 'good drag king', it has mastered these performances and this contributes to its success. This success is important in an environment when many small not-for-profit (NFP) organisations find it difficult to withstand the pressures of the contemporary economic and political environment (Staples, 2006), but still desire to deal with them creatively, or even potentially transgressively. Such issues are especially salient in ACE organisations, given that they are in a climate where educational institutions are coerced into becoming players in educational markets (Marginson, 1997). Where some similar organisations struggle to remain viable, the organisation we report on here (although not entirely unscathed) remains a considerable player in its sector. We suggest that much of this success might be attributed to its capacity to 'do drag'.

The paper begins by introducing our research in the college and providing some contextual background to the institution. From there we introduce the notion of drag as a practice as well as the central analytical concept that we bring to our analysis. Next, we use these empirical and theoretical resources to provide an interpretation of the college building up to the
metaphor of 'drag king'. This metaphor, we argue, helps us understand the ways that members of the organisation navigated the dual demands for the organisation to be identified through business and managerialist discourse on the one hand, and through community and educational discourse on the other. Here the drag performance is seen as a way that members of the college could resist the encroachment of changes to management practice, while still accepting its inevitability. The paper concludes by considering the implications of drag performance for the management of public education enterprises in the contemporary context.

Background and methods

The empirical material on which this paper draws comes from fieldwork undertaken in a community college as part of a research project investigating changes to the ways that learning is understood and mobilised in contemporary organisations. When we first went to this organisation it was not our aim to investigate any issues related to its management or governance. We entered with the aim of researching the lived experiences of people involved in the learning practices so as to develop and investigate detailed accounts of specific practices and their effects.

We utilised three main data collection methods at the college over a six-month period during 2006. First, we began with the analysis of a range of college documents where we were initially interested in the codification of organisational practices. Later we also analysed these documents in terms of the organisational identities they projected. Secondly, we carried out several hours of observations. Our purpose here was to compare observed organisational practices with any accounts of practices told by employees. Therefore thirdly, we conducted semi-structured, taped interviews with sixteen college employees from across all levels of the organisation. Our intention for the interviews was to elicit stories that accounted for what people understand as their jobs; how they 'do' their jobs, how they know how and what to do, and how they locate their own practice within a broader understanding of the dynamic meaning and purpose of their organisation.

In our analysis, we deployed the practices of narrative interviewing in order to gather empirical material that would lend itself to an interpretation of sequential events that use a plot to gain a causal structure that explains the effects of deliberate human action (Vaara, 2002). These stories could then be read and analysed collectively to develop an understanding of the organisation's collective memory as communicated and institutionalised through repetition (Orr/1990; Weick and Roberts, 1993). Taking as a starting point that 'most organisational realities are based on narration' (Weick, 1995, p.127), it was those realities, as narrated lived experience, that we were interested in understanding.

As we progressed with our work we came to realise that while people did talk to us about learning practices, the stories that they told us also resonated with the meaning and identity of the organisation. In this regard, the sense that people made out of their own work experience was very much circumscribed by a larger narrative concerning the college's response to increasing demands to be managed in a manner that emulated business and market-based models. While in our reading of the data we sought to identify the plots (Czarniawksa and Rhodes, 2006) that dominated the narration of the stories of experience, we found that these narratives concerned not just personal experience, but also the identity and characterisation of the college per se.
As we discussed and analysed the interviews and considered these in relation to the history of the organisation and the sector in which it operated, what became apparent to us were the tensions people felt between the educational and managerial demands that were placed on them. These tensions were indeed endemic in an organisation that at once was formed for the specific purpose of pursuing social justice goals, while at the same time being managed through practices such as 'total quality management'. In all, it was out of a sense of 'theoretical sensitivity' (Glaser, 1978) that we came to employ the concept of drag as an explanatory mechanism to understand the college.

The college and its Australian context

Community colleges are also understood locally as providers of Adult Community Education (ACE). ACE providers and their predecessors have been part of the education system of New South Wales since the early 1880s and have traditionally claimed provenance in discourses of social justice (BACE, 1996). In general they have grown out of concern for providing 'second chance' education for adults. Literacy and adult basic education have been, and remain, central features in their work. In recent years, however, the colleges' activities have expanded to include providing non-accredited leisure learning courses on a 'user pays' basis — a move that has placed part of their activities directly into a market-based focus. Over the last decade there has also been significant growth in the delivery of vocational education and training. All three types of delivery are included in the activities of the college we investigated, with 'user pays' delivery of liberal arts courses being the most prevalent. As well as entering into the fee for service education market, the growing incursion of managerialism in the sector is evidenced by the implementation of total quality management systems.

In early 1990s, all NSW colleges were required (by the government funding body) to adopt a 'Quality Management Framework'. It is the imposition of this quality management that marks an important turning point in the managerial ethos guiding the sector, with such management practices often seen as the 'totalising discourse' of managerialism (Knights and McCabe, 2000). This framework has undergone several transformations over the last decade and a half. In 2007 the college is accredited under the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) and claims to embed quality improvement procedures in all its business and tuition processes.

Specifically, the college we visited is a not-for-profit (NFP) organisation managed by a volunteer board and provides a range of adult community education courses. It employs a core administrative staff of 10 full-time staff, 15 (predominately casual) site coordinators as well as a pool of over 300 (casual) sessional tutors. While the college owns a site, the majority of its programmes are delivered across several local government areas at over 15 other locations. These sites include state high schools, community centres and other community-owned venues that the college leases on a casual basis. The college's administrative function is located on a second permanent site — leased (with a peppercorn rent arrangement) from the state Department of Education.

The administrative office of the college is located in the grounds of a state public school (a legacy of the NSW ACE sectors' origins in school education). It has its own entry from the street and occupies a small corner of the school. From outside, onlookers may have difficulty understanding that it was in fact different from the school. The first thing we noticed inside the offices is that the workspace is not purpose built. There is an ad hoc feeling about the physical space and decor of the college that provides a sense of it being some other sort of space that has been worked upon. In our observations we noted how there were traces of the
college originally being part of the school system (from child-sized toilets to offices with chalkboards). These worked to suggest the college being 'something else' at some other time (perhaps indicative of many non-profit organisations).

A similar ambiguity can be seen in how the college is positioned in relation to a series of competing accountabilities. The college is an adult community education provider (ACE), a NFP, a community organisation and a small to medium enterprise (SME) — it is also an employer. As an ACE provider, it is embedded in a purchaser/provider relationship with the state. Despite significant decreases in public funding over the past decade, it remains accountable to the state. In its public face it espouses a position as a NFP organisation — existing for the community rather than existing because of profits from the community — but at the same time it relies on revenues from fees in order to sustain its existence. So, as an incorporated 'community organisation' the college is accountable to the community, but as a SME it is in the business of selling 'educational products' in educational markets. And finally, because the college employs a number of staff to carry out its various functions, it has the added accountability of an employer. These various positions alone point to a heterogeneous organisational identity and also provide a platform for the following discussions — as George, the college principal, describes it:

… if we look at this organisation and how it's going to survive in a declining funding environment — well that's the major issue in front of us — the questions that come out of that is not only how do we survive — but how do we continue to do what we think we should be doing.

Here managerialism becomes practical in that the financial fortunes and survival of the college are seen as being directly linked to its success in the educational market.

First I was afraid — I was petrified

Having introduced the college where our research took place, we now turn to a discussion of our interaction with the college, with a particular focus on how gendered identities are both present and intertwined in the various discourses that generate meaning for this organisation as they are narrated by the organisations' members — we are concerned with how these discourses, when performed, undermine the purity of the assumed fixity of the gendered positions on which they rely. To do so we specifically seek to interrogate the gendered dynamics of the organisation in relation to drag performance. Drag, understood in an everyday sense, is about a person of one biological sex performing the role of a gender other than that sex — hence 'the performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed' (Butler, 1999, p. 175). Stereotypically (although not necessarily) this means a male performer dressed in flamboyant feminine clothing. An important aspect of drag is the performer does not try to trick or deceive the audience of a particular gender identity. Instead, the performance of drag troubles simple male/female gender categories in 'an effort to negotiate cross-gendered identification' (Butler, 1993, p.235). It is not that he becomes a she, or vice versa, but rather that the categories between them are questioned. As Butler suggests:

What is 'performed' in drag is, of course, the sign of gender, a sign that is not the same as the body that it figures, but cannot be read without it (1993,p. 237 emphasis in original)."
Hence, it is the sign of 'business', of 'NFP', and of 'community' organisations that we are interested in here, as they manifest in the actions of employees. We are interested in how these categories are 'performed' both by and within the organisation. We are interested in analysis of drag kings to come from this work because they take us beyond the common distinctions used to understand work practices, and especially in a NFP organisation — these are the gendered distinctions between business and community, between worker and manager, and (ultimately) between self and other.

A key concern in our take up of drag as an analytical concept is the troubling dualistic thinking that has informed conventional understandings of gender and homo/hetero-sexuality. Perhaps nowhere are these binaries more 'out' for inspection and confusion than in the performance of drag. 'Drag' is a useful concept because it helps trouble simple binary notions of gender, identity and sexuality. As Butler (1999) suggests '[I]n imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself-as well as its contingency' (p.175, italics in original). In using drag as a metaphor for understanding the college we draw attention to its performances — a parody of gendered organisational discourse that can be seen to displace a sense of unity over the meaning of the college. The college becomes as 'imitation without origin' (Butler, 1999, p-175).

The organisation practices we are concerned with are those that relate to the management of the organisation and how the people in the organisation understood them. From the beginning of our empirical work it became clear that a central means through which people in the organisation conceptualised their own organisation was in terms of whether it was a 'business' or a 'community/educational organisation'. While the relative merit of each of these categorisations and their associated practices was a matter of dispute, the comparison across this dualistic categorisation was not. Commenting on this George the principal said:

Basically it was a totally mismatch with what the expectations of the community were — it was somebody's ideas — a school-person's idea.

The mismatch that George refers to is a mismatch in expectations between how a business is expected to behave and how a school is expected to behave. As another member of staff suggested:

I think community is really important and I think that one thing about business is that it can get very cut-throat and dry — and I think that it does need business … [the] business community needs to understand that community is important — for example I think in business we need to cater for woman with small children and you need to cater for the disabled — and you need to cater for some groups — and so in a way business needs to add community — and community needs to add business — if you see what I mean — I think here it's been a community and I think that they would benefit from business skills — absolutely more business skills.

Immediately here we see the trace of gendered language informing the distinction between business and community, with the college itself being understood in relation to both. While these comments do suggest a certain intermingling of the notions of business and community management, it still retains the idea that business is 'cut-throat and dry' and that community is about catering 'for women and small children'. There is an 'aggressive frontier masculinity' (Marchand and Runyan, 2000, p. 13) which promotes values associated with competition over those associated with community and service (Acker, 1999).
In our discussions with college workers it became apparent that there were tensions between the business and community notions of the college. As they described the organisation they 'impersonated' naturalised business ideals. For example, notions of 'community', and of 'business' and of 'not-for-profit' organisation disrupted uncomplicated notions of 'the college'. These idealised notions relied on differentiation of alternate identities. Our first impression was that there were two oppositional discourses connected by a narrative that suggested a transition from one (community) to the other (business). Moreover, this distinction echoed a cultural logic of gender. The community discourse was stereotypically feminine (and maternal) in that its concerns were with caring, nurturing, developing and 'looking after' the clients/students and with social connectedness. The business discourse was stereotypically masculine in that it was premised on competitiveness, achievement, entrepreneurship and control. Moreover, as gender identities, the feminine/community was also construed as secondary and lacking where the object of lack crossed issues of finances, structure, politics, and business skills.

The encroachment of business discourse into the management of the college was intimated to us in various ways. As one of the site-co-ordinators, Zorro, commented:

… instead of hiring a contractor that is going to be bleeding money, if I can fix those things myself, I'm saving us a fair whack of cash because I know we need to look very closely at ways to cut out expenditure.

Here we see a focus on autonomy and financial management as a form of what Sinclair (1998) identifies as entrepreneurial organisational masculinity. The increasing demands of such masculinist culture were also recognised: as evident by one employee telling us that her decision to take a job in the college, after having worked in private enterprise for many years, was based on a desire to 'not push herself so much'. Again, a contrast between the business and community discourse was evident — business was about being performance driven and competitive, while community was about being compassionate and nurturing. The inclusive and empathetic character of the community discourse was summed up by Zorro, who added to his earlier comments that:

… the college is for all those people but it's not only for those people it's for me and it's for all those people at head office and for all the tutors and it's for the work-for-the-dole people and it's for the immigrants that come here to learn English who want to join our community who come from another country — so it's a community thing — so that's a nice lovey-dovey-thing.

Here we see this 'lovey-dovey-thing' as almost a parody of femininity, but still recognising it as the stable identity of the college. In all, there was a romanticised and feminised notion of what it was to be a NFP and/or community organisation. In contrast to what was perceived as the hard/masculine domain of business, there was a prejudice that community organisations were more soft and feminine. When discussing her decision to join the college as customer services manager, Emma suggested that:

I decided that I wouldn't mind having a year off… working in community and not pushing myself so much and I thought I might work at the college around the corner.
Despite this comment, throughout her interview, Emma persistently referred to the college as 'a business'. Such a perspective, however, did not stand up to the experience of working in the college. Another member of staff reflected on the preconceptions of the college:

I think I thought…yeah … I think that I was looking forward to none of the politics and the whole cover your arse syndrome and the managers all this kind of crap … but really … it's the same … same shit… different stink really.

This version of the college was performed not only by the workers' talk but also in that signs of 'community organisation' were clearly evident in many of its public and internal documents. This served to give convincing performances of the college as a community organisation. So far, what this suggests is that managerialism, while present in the college, had not subsumed other discourses in circulation. Fred, one of the faculty managers, echoed that this tension was embedded in the practice of the college:

The tensions exist in — they're not just tensions that exist between individuals — they're real numbers on bits of paper — just — it's a real thing […] you've got two perspectives — you've got the financial and you've got the educational and you've got two ways of looking at the same thing.

In terms of the analysis that we bring to this study this suggests that these two perspectives — understood here as masculine and feminine — were indeed co-existent. The entry of business and market-based managerial discourse had taken its place, but it had not taken over. Having got this far, we now move on to consider in more detail the nature of this relation, characterized by Fred as 'tension'.

'And you see me — somebody new'

Despite the obviousness and ubiquity of the masculine business discourse in the college, it was not something accepted without resistance. This was illustrated in our conversation with the college's principal as we were discussing the use of performance appraisal processes in the college. These appraisals were something required to be performed as part of the college's drive towards improving managerial control through the creation of explicit and contract-like performance agreements between the management and the staff. Nevertheless, the principal did not express a wholehearted adoption of this rhetoric:

In theory that [performance appraisals] is what I am supposed to do — probably the college council expect that that's what I do — and probably I would tell them that that's what I do — but really the performance appraisal is an ongoing relationship I have with people.

The principal's comments illustrate that the newer business discourse, while present, was not adopted 'as is'. The resulting meaning was thus something that was performed in relation to the discourse in which it was embedded, but at the same time this performativity was not behoven to it. In a sense it operated in the space in-between — illustrating Butler's point that:

> Performativity describes this relation of being implicated in what one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not pure' opposition, a 'transcendence' of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure (Butler, 1993, p. 241).
Indeed it is in such impurity as located in the murky and contested intersection of business and community that its members performed 'the college'. Moreover we need to be quick to note that these distinctions were not ones where business discourse was necessarily dominant or privileged. As a member of the customer service team, who had joined the college from having previously worked in a commercial organisation commented:

If anything I have found it harder, I am a square peg in a round hole. Because I am corporate background and very business focused, I am very black and white especially with staff, you know three strikes you're out, I'm not harsh, but here it's a lot more softly-softly approach.

With these comments we see business being associated with the masculine 'survival of the fittest' norms, and at the same time the implication is that these norms were out of place in the college. This person did not make the assumption that the business model was superior. Indeed, her comments suggest quite the contrary — that it was her ideas that had changed as a result of her working experience in the college. As she commented to us later: 'I had a misconception working in business that you either work or you don't, that's it'. Similar sentiments were echoed by another member of staff in a similar position who commented that: 'I'm used to a business environment — and I think this is an educational environment with a principal — and it's a school — and I was here for a business'. The point being made here is that despite the business rhetoric that circulated through the college, it still maintained what appears to be a seemingly preferred identity in relation to its educational purpose and community-based provenance — the new managerialist narrative that proposed a definite shift from a public management past to a business future was not present in such a simplistic form. As Maggie, a project officer, commented on first joining the college:

I felt that it was very unbusinesslike — but this isn't a business. In a way it is a school — and I think that some changes need to happen here […] I guess I didn't know — I don't think it's much different than I thought — it is a school — and I think perhaps it might have been a little more business orientated than it is […] and I think that some changes need to happen here — and I also need to adjust to the environment here.

Despite the differentiation between the relatively pure narrative positions of 'business' and 'community', the reality that was performed not only lacked strict boundaries but also suggested that the college had still retained some semblance of a community identity.

The mutual co-existence of business and educational discourse in the college is also evident if we compare the types of language used in two Codes of Conduct in place at the college — one for teachers and the other for administrative staff. Whereas the teachers' code refers explicitly to 'teachers' and 'students', the administrative code talks about 'customers'. Elsewhere (in the policy for employment of casual/session tutors) these people are referred to as 'our clients'. Such different labels already indicate tensions between different discourses. Similarly in practice, the contrasting labels of customer and students were apparent. While the tutors and teachers tended to refer to the people in their classrooms as students, Emma the customer services manager (perhaps not coincidentally a job title she made up herself), had a different view:

If I am a student I buy a product, I want it to happen, I don't care that the tutor was sick, I don't care about all that stuff, so I am pushing it, continually pushing it, I don't care about that other stuff, sort it out, I bought a product and I want it to happen.
Alice, the business faculty manager, described the management of this tension as a balancing act between two competing needs:

The only way you can really do it [balance acting like a business with social justice beliefs] — is that you can say — without the business side of things there wouldn't be a community college — and all those equity programmes would disappear — and that's the justification for going down that path — you know our college is in a very fortunate position — you know we could continue for five years — without changing anything — we'd be flat — we would die at the end of it — that would be the end of [name] community college — so that's a very good position to be in — and we're very lucky to be in that position.

Clear in this statement is that while the 'business side of things' was recognised as being powerful, it was still seen as secondary to the 'true' purpose and identity of the college as a community organisation. The business perspective had to be performed, for sure, but the only 'justification' for 'going down the path' of 'acting like a business' was to preserve the college as a community organisation. Fred, another faculty manager, discussed this at some length:

That it's all about just making money — because that's just what people think — survival yeah — but it's kind of like a small business mentality in the ACE sector and here there are people who think we are running a business — even though it's community owned and managed — some people don't — they ignore — they are able to ignore the structural difference between a community college and a small business and see a community college as a small business — especially people that come from a small business — they've got that sort of financial view that they come from a small business and they don't really understand education — the fact that it's education and community owned is not really very well understood … whereas other people understand that fully and …see that as being the whole raison d'etre of the organisation — to provide education, to provide equitable accessible education — and don't understand the [business mentality] — and because the college council is made up of people with both of those views — and the staff are made up of people with both of those views — both of those views are put forward and you know — tension — [laughs] inevitable tension.

In other words, the heterosexual distinction (business/masculine vs. community/feminine) was increasingly subject to subversion. Despite the acknowledgment of the potency of the demand for the business model, the raison d'etre of the organisation remained educational. This was echoed again when Zorro, one of the tutors, said:

I really like to be in the college because it is part of the community. … when you are in a classroom it is a community and its not just in the classroom […] I'm not the customer mentality I'm the community mentality … people who pay money to do a course, you're not a customer… you're a student… it's a bit hairy… because they are a customer and the customer is always right.

'And I learned how to get along'

What the discussion in the previous section suggests is, first, that business and market discourse had not taken over as defining the college and its practices, second, that there was a tension between the college being 'business' and the college being 'community, and, third, that within this tension the business perspective was something that had been adopted out of necessity, but that nostalgically masked a more preferred conception of the college as being
community focussed. It is from this analysis that we can consider the college in relation to drag. We understand this as a type of organisational drag, one which:

… serves a subversive function to the extent that it reflects the mundane impersonations by which heterosexually ideal genders are performed and naturalised and undermines their power by virtue of effecting that exposure (Butler 1993, p. 231).

More particularly we can understand it as a 'drag king' performance in that to survive in its current environment, the organisation had to act like a business (masculine) while having emerged from the community (feminine). The result was a mixing of the two, as well as contestation over their dominance.

What became clearer however was that whichever 'identity' was evoked presupposed the possibility of a contradictory one — the two were collapsing into each other. Some workers, on recognising this, had their own strategies for balancing the tensions. As Fred said to us:

I'm not advocating deception but sometimes you have to — within the language — you have to sort of make your project be a good fit… you could says it's a skill or you could say its being forced to be slightly pragmatic.

Rather than think of this as a mutually exclusive business/community dualism where one pole competes with its other, it is more helpful to understand these identities as mutually productive of one another. That is, today, the masculine is a necessary 'performance' for the college to continue its core function of serving the community. Alice describes this mutual productiveness as follows:

The only way you can really do it — is that you can say — without the business side of things there wouldn't be a community college — and all those equity programmes would disappear.

Thus what was being subverted was the unavoidable reality of the financial realities of business, especially in an environment where the funding for programmes was precarious. These realities were described by Fred:

[If] the funding falls — we're limited. We need to make up the income shortfall or reduce spending — we can do that by increasing fees which we have done — spending reductions generally tend to be made by cutting provision of programmes rather than cutting staff or — you know it's rare in organisations like this for people to say well, you know, we're doing it, tough, so let's sack him — that will come at some point — at some point in the future.

This issue of funding, however, was not necessarily seen in relation to the primary function of the organisation — as if the financial realities of costs and revenues provided the rationale for the organisation. From the perspective of the principal, for example, the financial aspects of the organisation were seen always as secondary. This is not to say that they were unimportant, but just that they provided the limits around what was possible for the community. As George suggests:

Well the second thing on our list is that we look at the changing demographic — if we look at this organisation and how it's going to survive in a declining funding environment — well that's the major issue in front of us — the questions that come out of that is not only how do
we survive — but how do we continue to do what we think we should be doing — we run programmes of the community — which we believe are in line with the needs of the community — but on the other hand we use that to cross-subsidise into equity areas — so if we are to survive then how are we to do that — well clearly the opportunity for us to survive is to cut back on the nonessential — which is our equity area — from purely budgeting sense — you would say well you're not making any money — so why would you continue with it — especially if you're in going to be in decline over the next five to 10 years let's say.

Following our metaphor, the drag king organisation was an imitation and parody of masculinity. Nonetheless this imitation was performative, in that it also reconfigured the older notions of what it meant to be a community organisation such that its identity in relation to gendered discourses became 'un-fixed'.

'And I'll survive — I will survive'

In general, the NSW ACE sector (including the college we investigated) has undergone significant changes brought about by a re-positioning of the public sector. For the most part, organisational members of the ACE sector have been proactive throughout these changes (Rooney, 2004, p. 146-147). ACE organisations have strategically shaped and re-shaped their activity in response to broader policy agendas (McIntyre, 2001). Is it possible that their performance of drag has helped them do this?

While it might be the case that there is by now a dominant vision of public managers as the entrepreneurs of a new, leaner, and increasingly privatised government, emulating not only the practices but also the values of business' (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000, p. 549), the case we report here suggests that this emulation is far from totalising. The encroachment of managerial/business discourse on the college has not been characterised by a simple replacement of the one by the other. Instead, both business and community based discourse are complicated by the presence of each other: a business not possible without community, community not possible without business, not-for-profit not possible without profit-making. In other words, like the drag king performing 'male', the identity that was performed defied all purist and dualistic versions of the college.

In the case of the college, what we observed was a masquerade of the masculine. It is important to note however (after Bataille, in Pullen, 2006) that after repeated performances the mask begins to takes the shape of the face. Furthermore the mask does not just conceal the face but it has the potential to reveal. This bears direct relevance to the performance of the drag king — the masculine mask revealed, concealed and mutated the old community discourse. It rendered the college in a new form — but one that was emergent and becoming rather than prefigured by business and/or community — a process that is (and will do doubt continue to be) incomplete. The performance goes on.

By locating our discussion of drag most generally in relation to 'non-dualistic thought and pedagogy' (Sedgwick, 2003), in this paper we have questioned the distinctions between community and business discourse that informs the practice of community education providers. We note here that the incursion of private sector management practices in such an organisation position them in gendered discourse in that the male (business) is understood as replacing and improving on the ever-lacking community (female). In questioning these dualisms and their hierarchy, we examined the contestation over the organisation, as it can be understood as gendered. Moreover, we suggest that when seen as performance rather than
discourse, gender distinctions in managerial practice begin to collapse in a form of 'drag' where the heterosexist purity that informs these central discursive categories is potentially subverted. We used the metaphor of 'drag kings' to understand the feminine organisation which performs as male, and in so doing threatens to 'undo' its gender (cf. Butler, 2004). So, while the college exemplifies the demands on people, regardless of sex, to 'manage like a man' (Wajcman, 1998)

we add that such forms of management might be a form of parody and potential subversiveness associated with drag performance.

The college where we conducted our research operated in an environment where traces of 'business' and 'community' as well as 'not-for-profit' and 'education' discourses are ever-present and are in contestation. A simple narrative of the transition from one to the other simply did not hold. It was this very contestation, and its resultant un-decidability that provided the space for the college to perform who it was. This performance requires knowing not only when but also how to perform a 'community', 'business', 'not-for-profit', 'profit-making' and/or 'educational' organisation. It also means working in the space between these. The people we spoke to at the college decided when and how to perform particular versions of the organisation. Through these performances — drag performances — the college's masquerade refashioned it beyond the normative discourses within which it was located. It was this masquerade that was central to the meaning of the college … and to its ability to survive.

References


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