CHAPTER 2

STUDYING GENDER AND TEAMS:
SITE SELECTION, METHODS, AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I lay out the study of gendered processes in self-managing teams. First, I describe the selection of organizations and teams for this study. Second, I explain in more depth my choice of methodology, which entailed observing teams in their natural setting and interviewing team members. I also discuss the epistemological underpinnings of studying gendered processes. In the third section, I discuss the limitations of the study, and how those limitations also shape the findings I present in the subsequent chapters. In the conclusion, I also reflect upon some main difficulties in studying gender and teams.

2.1. Site Selection: "Desperately Seeking Teams"

> I was extremely excited about embarking on a new, in-depth study of the daily life of a workplace. But I was filled with trepidation as well. The time that had elapsed between receiving the permission to carry out my research and actually starting to do it had been five months, ... all of which was devoted to hammering out the terms upon which I could do research in this organization. I worked and waited through the entire five months, conscientiously pursuing all angles to get the research going, returning phone calls promptly, tracking down and contacting systematically all the appropriate individuals..., and sending multiple iterations of correspondence in which I specified the goals of my research and the lengths to which I was prepared to go to protect my subjects (Vicki Smith, 1997: 425-426).

Vicki Smith's ordeal with organizational field research illustrates the various obstacles (and sentiments) involved in gaining entry to work organizations. Similarly, to study self-managing teams in their natural settings, I also had to carefully explain who I was, what I wished to study, and most importantly, why I wanted to study gender relations. To find site organizations for my study, I began a multidirectional search for self-managing teams, which included posting a request for case-study teams on TeamNet, an Internet discussion list.[14] My posting prompted several replies; among them was an offer from a North Carolina management consultant to help me find suitable organizations for the study. The consultant provided me with several names of former clients throughout the Eastern United States, whom he had helped implement self-managing teams.

Although I managed to find all three sites (and the four teams in them) through the TeamNet discussion list, I also explored other avenues, one of which was to approach the regional chapters of national management clearinghouses, such as the Association for Quality and Participation (AQP) and the American Society for Quality Control (ASQC). Despite a written request that

[14] TeamNet, maintained by the Center for the Study of Work Teams at the University of North Texas, is an international electronic discussion list that deals with issues related to work teams.

appeared in an AQP-Richmond chapter's newsletter and another request I made personally in an AQP meeting in Richmond, I gained no organizational contacts from these efforts. In addition, I found two organizations by researching the past applications for the U.S. Senate Productivity and Quality Award for Virginia at the Virginia Tech Center for Quality and Participation, which hosts the annual contest. However, these two organizations, after examining my study proposal more closely, declined my request.

Following the consultant's recommendation, I contacted the human resources representatives of several companies. Each of these contacts generated additional contacts in other organizations. The contact with each of the six organizations entailed sending them a short problem statement that included research questions and a time plan (length of my presence in the company, length of each interview, total time needed to conduct interviews, and a suggestion for an interview date). Some companies also received an interview protocol and an informed consent form. To all organizations, I attached a letter describing my academic background and information about the foundations funding this study. I also explained how the findings might benefit the company. I offered to share my findings with them either in writing or in a workshop for those sites that were in close proximity. The letter also included a statement concerning confidentiality. Later, the companies that agreed to be studied received a copy of the informed consent form accepted by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board.

Two of the site organization in this study, Eastern Alliance Bank and Omni Insurance (both pseudonyms) resulted from this search, the first of which had two teams. The third site organization, Motorcol Manufacturing (also a pseudonym), I found after I posted my initial request again on the TeamNet discussion list a few months later. This time, the Vice-President of the company invited me to visit the site and talk with him about my research project. Although Motorcol is a manufacturing plant, the particular team the Vice-President recommended for my study is a customer service team and, therefore, fit my research needs.

2.1.1. Selection Bias

The three organizations in this study represent a convenience sample; they were the only organizations that agreed to accommodate my field study. Most organizations I contacted claimed to be unable to meet my research needs and declined at various stages of the negotiation process. Information about the reasons for declining my study might have helped me better understand the selection bias for the site organizations; however, I learned very little from the organizations' responses to my research request. For example, it remains unclear why some organizations refused to participate after having read the research proposal and others, even after they examined the informed consent forms and the detailed interview protocols. Explaining why they had declined my request, several human resource representatives referred to "business reasons," managers' reluctance, and the presence of another researcher at the time I had suggested for doing my fieldwork. One representative informed me that the company's lawyers were examining my proposal and, soon after that, she declined my request.[15] Some organizational gatekeepers (i.e., human resources representatives) hesitated to introduce the idea to the management because, they

[15] Interestingly, a few weeks later, the company closed one of its operations and laid off a large number of workers in that plant.

argued, their teams were only at the beginning stages of self-direction and not yet ‘mature’.[16]

The decision to participate in the study was made by management. Furthermore, the choice of which team or teams participated in the study was entirely up to the company. My request included only that the team have a gender mix and that it be “self-managing” according to the team’s or the company’s criteria. After numerous rejections based on “immaturity,” I thought it best to revise my initial preference for ‘mature’ self-managing teams.[17] I believe, however, that the case-study teams resemble--perhaps more closely than “fully mature” teams would--the reality of self-management in the service sector and reflect the diverse experiments with self-management in service teams. The transformation to team-based, self-directed structures is an ongoing endeavor that involves a variety of forms and degrees of self-management. If perfect matches to the ideal-typical self-managing team are, in reality, virtually non-existent, one may learn more about service sector self-managing teams (as well as about transition processes) by exploring those forms that do exist.

In many respects, the four case-study teams in three organizations capture the diversity of ways in which organizations and managers understand and deal with the idea of self-management. The teams can be arranged along a continuum of self-management, from various informal and partial attempts to encourage employees to work independently on specific tasks to the officially-designated, independent work units that carry the label “self-managing team.” I wish to underscore that, although we talk about self-managing teams, what this study (and other studies) of service teams can capture at this juncture may, in fact, be the process of *becoming* a self-managing team. While the strength of this study may not be in making generalizations about gender in “mature” self-managing teams, it brings to the team debate evidence of the ways in which gender shapes teams as they “organize” toward self-management.[18]

2.2. Research Methods

2.2.1. A Multiple Case Study Design

This study follows the logic of a multiple case study. According to Robert Yin (1994: xv), a case study is perhaps the most appropriate research design for studying the complexity of organizational phenomena. Moreover, social scientists often use a case study method when posing

---

[16] In the case of Omni Insurance (see Ch. 3), I was in touch with two different representatives, one of whom declined my request, citing ‘immature teams’, while the other offered to introduce the idea to a team with whom he was working, the City County team.

[17] According to one work team researcher, fully mature self-managing teams were virtually non-existent in the service sector at the time [Macy, 1996, personal communication]).

[18] Recently, some organization theorists have begun to view organizations as “organizing,” a point of view which, instead of seeing an organization as an abstraction (and thus unchangeable), focuses on the organizing *process* involved (Brown, 1991; Acker, 1995). “Organizing” emphasizes that “organizations are continually constituted through practices and processes that occur through the actions of organizational participants” (Acker, 1995: 137).

questions of "how" or "why" (Yin, 1994: 1). I chose a case study design to explore team processes and to gain contextual understanding of each team in its organizational surroundings. A case study design also was suitable for this particular study because it did not require long involvement in the site organizations, which could have made gaining entry even more difficult. A multiple (rather than a single) case study allows the investigator to replicate the study in somewhat different circumstances to see if similar results are obtained (Yin, 1994: 45). Because the circumstances and environment of the four teams were different, I found that the gendered processes also differed in each of them. By following the same question outline in interviewing each team member, I was able to tap into the differences and similarities among the teams. The differences among the teams--for example, composition, organizational status, and task--often cast light onto various power dynamics that intersected with gendered power relations, for example, those based on race-ethnicity and organizational status. Finally, identifying some gendered processes that occurred across teams, despite their different contexts, lends credibility to the findings (e.g., Yin, 1994: 46).

2.2.2. Choosing a Method

Setting out to explore how gender shapes self-managing teamwork, I chose to study teams qualitatively, through the first-hand experiences of team members. The idea that reality is constructed through individual experience reflects the basic ontological assumption of the qualitative paradigm: "reality is subjective and multiple as seen by participants in a study" (Cresswell, 1994: 5). Using the ethnographic methods of observation and interviews enabled me to access the gendered *processes* present in mixed-sex self-managing teamwork and to understand the meanings women and men give to their daily experiences in teams (Cresswell, 1994: 145; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 2).

My goal was to learn about gender in self-managing teams from the team members whose daily work is done in teams. In order to obtain a thorough picture of how gender shaped and was shaped by 'team processes', I used a "data triangulation method" (Yin, 1994: 92). That is, I collected three types of data: individual-level information obtained in semi-structured interviews, observations of team meetings, and historical information from team documents. In case studies, the use of multiple sources of evidence

> allows the investigator to address a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioral issues. . . . Thus any finding or conclusion in a case study is likely to be much more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information (Yin, 1994: 92).

While I examined most available documents describing past team activities (for example, minutes of meetings) this aspect of triangulation yielded, at best, superficial information. It turned out that only one team took minutes at its meetings and kept archives of its past activity. In fact, another team had unanimously decided to forgo minute-taking, claiming it was a "waste of time." That most team members did not consider routine teamwork worth documenting suggests that teams may indeed have a role in debureaucratizing the contemporary workplace.

Face-to-face interviews and observation of team meetings and organizational practices provided rich, contextual data of the team members' experiences and conveyed the meanings they gave to their team interactions. While interaction between men and women was not the only concern of this study, respondents' accounts of routine situations among team members were valuable for exploring how members were 'doing' or 'accomplishing gender' through interaction (West and Fenstermaker, 1993). One example of "doing gender" in team interaction was my serendipitous finding of emotions as tools of power and influence (which I examine in Chapter 5).

2.2.3. Data Collection

Once inside the organization, I was able to freely conduct my research. All interviews took place at work; all three organizations gave me a quiet room where I could conduct the interviews. Most team members were readily available to be interviewed during their work time.
While my intention was to interview all members of each team, there were one or two members whom I missed because they were absent from work at the time; in one case, I returned to the site a year later to conduct a "missing" interview.

All interviews followed the same question outline (see Appendix A), although the order in which I proceeded varied according to the situation and the flow of discussion. As a consequence, the interviews ranged in length from 20 minutes to over one hour. My intent was to elicit from a team member information concerning his or her experiences of teamwork and to probe specifically about gender issues. Most of all, I was interested in a member's own perception of the team's gender relations, division of labor, and decision-making processes. "Filtered through the views of the interviewees," their responses captured the meanings they gave to team processes (Cresswell, 1994: 150). By attending team meetings (when available), I also observed the members' interaction and conversation before, during, and after the meeting.

I audio-taped all interviews with the respondent's consent . When I inquired about sensitive or confidential topics, I made clear I could turn off the tape recorder, should the respondent wish not to be taped. However, no one took the opportunity to speak "off the record." In a few cases, a respondent simply declined to speak about a sensitive subject or name a person whose behavior he or she was describing. Despite the oral and written (i.e., the informed consent form) assurances of confidentiality, at times, I sensed that a respondent was concerned about my relationship with management. For example, one black woman respondent expressed her concern about my referring to her by her race-ethnicity because that might reveal her identity to the rest of the predominantly white team. Without pressuring anyone, I continued to assure all team members that the interviews were confidential and encouraged them to describe sensitive situations and refer to others by their names. Although most respondent did not hesitate to name names, if someone appeared uncomfortable with doing so, I did not probe any further.

I kept a field journal throughout the research process and updated it with my observations and thoughts after each day in the field. Because my goal was to examine each team in its organizational context, my field notes describe many organizational characteristics, such as the physical layout, policy slogans and posters, interactions among people, and my impressions about the atmosphere of the site. For example, in one organization, I was struck by and wrote extensively about the "quality- oriented" slogans on posters and the "IDRT" ("I Did the Right Thing") buttons that decorated the desk spaces of many employees. That helped me interpret the company's self-managing team efforts within the broader context of the managerial "trendism" that was exhibited throughout the work areas.[19] I also made notes after each interview about the flow of the conversation, the mood of the interview, and possible difficulties of probing about specific topics.

In an example from my field notes, I consider the gendered nature of the interview situation:

> 5th day... Just talked to [one man] and, during the interview, I realized something: the men [interviewees] were not looking at me in the eye when they were responding. [That] made me conscious because it seemed that they were staring at my questions on the table. When that happened for the first time, I started covering my questions--now I realize that they were just fixing their eyes at something so that they would not [have to] maintain eye contact with me.

This observation illustrates the ways in which "doing gender" became evident throughout the field study, even in interviews. It also shows how I, as the interviewer, became aware of the effects of my own gender in the interview situation. Accordingly, I found that women respondents were more intimate with me and, for example, maintained eye contact throughout the interview.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim by me and two other people whom I hired. To make sure all interviews were transcribed correctly, word-for-word, I compared each transcript to the taped interview. That also helped me became more intimately acquainted with the data, which proved especially valuable as I began coding them. I coded all interviews using Nud*ist© qualitative software. I sorted the data into categories that reflected the interview questions and the themes that emerged from my initial impressions of the interviewees' responses. Some categories I formed by doing text searches on particular words and expressions, such as "warm body" or "e-mail" (the use of which I explain in Ch. 4). The software was helpful especially for accessing and searching through a relatively complex and large qualitative data set. In the analysis, I used the coded data, various text searches, and my field notes that reflected the interview situations, the team's organizational contexts as well as my initial reactions to the physical work environment.

2.2.3.1. Data collection as data analysis: Intersection of gender and race

The analysis of qualitative data often takes place at the same time as the investigator is collecting and sorting data and writing reports (Cresswell, 1994: 153). This principle of qualitative research also became relevant in my study as, more than once, I had to revise my questions to better represent what I had already learned in the field. One important example of revising interview

---

[19] In my field notes, I describe one organization as follows:

> Outside my "office," on the bulletin board, there is a flyer about a lunch seminar series on "Achieving Balance in Work and Personal Life," with topics such as: "Managing Stress: The Road to Resiliency," "Managing Expectations, Attitudes, Guilt" or "Planning, Organizing, and Prioritizing." [The second one] talked about self-management and one of the subtitles was "Strategies for Becoming a Self-Manager." This would indicate that self-management is seen by the company as an individual trait/skill, not a team skill and, quite possibly, this could explain why one member referred to his work [not his team] as self-managing...

questions is the process by which I came to understand the intertwining effects of gender and race-ethnicity.

Although I understood, theoretically, the need to explore gender, race-ethnicity, and class status as intersecting structures that shape individuals' lived experiences, I had not incorporated questions about intersecting structures into the interview outline (referring to the ability to maintain an analytical separation of the two). However, after the first interview with a black woman (which fortunately took place in the very beginning of my field study), I realized I could not continue to overlook the significance of race-ethnicity in my attempt to explore gendered processes. I was forced to rethink my questions after the following exchange with Brenda, a black woman:[20]

> WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE GREATEST CHALLENGES FOR YOU TO WORK IN A TEAM ?
>
> For me to work in a team...
>
> IS THERE SOMETHING SPECIFICALLY STRESSFUL ABOUT IT?
>
> ...(long silence)... It's hard for me to talk to you about being a woman and not talk to you about being a black woman. Being a black female is the hardest part because I feel like so much is on my shoulder to prove that we can do as well as anyone else given the same opportunities, and that's my greatest challenge (Brenda, black woman, 42, Eastern Alliance Employee Credit team).

After this incident, I concluded that, in order for me to understand gender, I had to take into account race-ethnicity. Accordingly, I incorporated race-ethnicity into questions that dealt with a team member's own interpretation of team interaction and his or her experience in the team. I reworded the following questions in order to encourage the respondent to think about his/her race-ethnicity (revisions are in italics):

> How do you think your being a *white/black/Hispanic* man/woman influences how you interact with the team?
>
> In what ways do you think your experience as a *white/black/Hispanic* man/woman is different from the experiences of other men/women in your team? How is it similar?

Focusing on race-ethnicity yielded interesting and relevant information about the respondent's views on diversity issues and also opened the door to discussing race-ethnicity in general, including organizational responses to minority employees. Therefore, a team member's choice of responding either to the race-ethnicity aspect of the question ("...as a *white/black/Hispanic*

---

[20] Throughout this document, I present my analysis through direct quotes from the interviewees. Instead of identifying my own comments with my initials, I present my questions and comments always in uppercase and the interviewee's responses in lowercase. After citing a respondent, I provide his or her pseudonym, race-ethnicity, sex, and age. When discussing several responses from members across teams, I also state the name of the team after the demographic information.

man/woman...?”) or to the gender aspect (“... as a white/black/Hispanic *man/woman*...?”) or to both (“... as a *white/black/ Hispanic man/woman*...?”) often uncovered important information about the team dynamics.

It was particularly difficult for white people, both men and women, to talk about their race. Instead, introducing the question of race-ethnicity often instigated white women to discuss their *gendered* experiences of domination and subordination (interestingly, one black man talked about the difficulties faced by white women). The race-ethnicity questions also confused many white men. Some of them responded by tapping into the public discourse of the historical “white male dominance.” The following interview exchange illustrates this tendency:

> DO YOU THINK THAT YOUR BEING A WHITE MAN HAS ANY IMPACT ON HOW YOU INTERACT WITH THE TEAM MEMBERS'?
>
> That's a tough question. I'm sure it does because I mean, I guess historically the white male has been favored just in about every situation that goes on. But, I don't wield any more power. I don't try to throw anything like that around (laughs). I don't really --- all I can give you is historically, I mean the white male has been promoted faster, earns more money, but I didn't have any choice as to how I was born like that. I mean that's (laughs), or at least I don't think I did anyway.
>
> DO YOU SEE ANY OF THAT HAPPENING IN THE TEAM?
>
> No. I really don't think that where I work... I may be wrong, I don't know. I don't analyze it down to that level, but I don't really see that happening. But I will say over, historically, though, you know, it does seem it hasn't hurt being a white man doing anything I've done. I'll tell you that straight out. I mean it's, I do think there is some, you know, maybe gender or racial discrimination. I mean, I'm sure that it's still out there. I don't, I don't think it exists in our hiring practice for the team. At least I certainly hope it doesn't (Mel, white man, 32, Eastern Alliance Special projects team).

In my view, this discourse allowed them to adopt a more external view of the race issue and, sometimes, to avoid examining how their personal experience was shaped by their gender and racial-ethnic privilege. Sometimes, the race question prompted white men and women to discuss the experiences of their teammates of color, instead of their own experience as whites. This reveals the tendency among whites to believe they do not have access to racial experiences (Ely, 1995). One example of this is an exchange I had with Frank, a white man:

> IF YOU THINK OF YOUR EXPERIENCE AS A WHITE MAN, HOW DO YOU THINK IT IS DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER TEAM MEMBERS’ EXPERIENCE?
>
> There was a time in my life when I would have said that it should be no different. But I'm sure it's different simply because of..., you said a white man...OK, I think I can, I can't speak for any women, and what they've had to put up with, because I don't talk to that many women about problems in the office or if somebody were

> making advances on them or something like that. I assume everyone around here is decent enough not to do that. But Johnny is in field service. He's an Afro–American, black man. He's a nice guy, I respect Johnny quite a bit. I always assumed everyone is treated the same regardless of race. That's just the way I [treat] people. Anybody who sits down next to me, they're welcome to sit there. And I talk to them as at least an equal, if not a superior. But talking to Johnny, I found out it's not that way. It sets me back a little bit that he feels there's some racism that still goes on around here...
>
> CAN YOU GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE OF HOW YOU CAME TO REALIZE THAT?
>
> I haven't seen it actually happening. This is all on his word of how difficult it was for him to get into field service, and how certain things he was told [that] other people weren't told. Like when he finally got into field service, he was told that if you don't work out in this position you're not going to be able to go back to your previous position in the lab, working in the engineering lab. Whereas other people have been told, like Bryan, "well, if field service doesn't work out you can always go back to aftermarket." He felt like that wasn't right, and I agree ... I don't know how much to put into what he says. I grew up in a part of [the state] where there were no blacks at the school I went to. There was one guy in college, and that was it. ... And so I always just assumed that everybody was treated the same way I was. Very naive, like I said. I'm still fighting with that naive part of myself, because I want to treat everybody the same way I was treated, and I assume they were. And when I hear that they're not, I can't relate to it (Frank, white man, 35, Motorcol CSN team).

Frank's comments highlight his reluctance to examine his own race-ethnicity but, at the same time, reveals a possible discriminatory situation faced by a black teammate. Inquiring about race-ethnicity thus extended the discussion of gender to racial-ethnic power dynamics. It also helped cast light onto the various intersections of gender and race-ethnicity that I, as a white woman, might otherwise have overlooked. Thus, reflecting upon race relations also helped me recognize my personal and theoretical bias of privileging gender over other processes that maintain organizational inequality. In the next section, I explore some epistemological assumptions underlying my research as well as my findings and discuss the difficulties of studying gender.

2.3. Analyzing Gender: How Do We Know Something is "Gendered"?

This question plagued me throughout the research project, from data collection through analysis, and therefore calls for a more detailed discussion of gender as an object of study. I did not begin the field research as a *tabula rasa*; instead, I carried in my mind a theoretical framework that I believed would guide me to the right places (e.g., the four gendering processes) where I could find gender "in action," that is, shaping teamwork. However, as I looked for gendered experiences and manifestations of [oppressive] gender relations, I found it difficult to infer with confidence that gender in fact did influence the situations and interactions I witnessed or learned about in interviews.

I was faced with a problem: how could I find concrete manifestations of gendered processes that would allow me to illustrate the ways in which gender functioned as an organizing principle in teamwork? Observing as well as asking the respondents about the relations between men and women would naturally be the place to start. However, because I had a rule not to use the term "gender" in my questions (but instead to refer to "men" and "women" in order not to confuse the respondent), the team members' responses to my "gender questions" mostly yielded descriptions of situations where men and women (bodies) were actors. Yet, gender encompasses more than women and men as bodies/actors; it is embedded, for example, in organizational logic, rules, norms, attitudes, values, behaviors, identities, cultures, language, metaphors, and symbols (Alvesson and Billing, 1997). In order to capture gender in its broader meaning (beyond men and women as sex categories or bodies), I had to make visible also those aspects of gender that were not necessarily recognized by the respondents. Hence, to understand meaning construction as an interactive process, I must discuss the differences between the respondents' and my own interpretations of gender in teams.

This study is grounded in the epistemological notion that gender shapes social processes in ways that are both hidden and visible. When gender is hidden, I believe it is task of the researcher to cast light onto gendered processes; in other words, to make them visible. Naturally, it is easier to argue for the existence of a gendered process when others, and especially those whose experiences are being studied, agree on the presence of gender in their experiences. The existence of gendered processes, however, was often contested by team members, many of whom denied the idea that their experiences were shaped by their being women or men. Although in many instances, respondents referred to sex-based divisions, for example, in team tasks, they often resisted the idea that other aspects of their daily work life--for example, their team interactions--were shaped by gendered power relations. Instead, many referred to other explanations, such as organizational hierarchy or education (which according to my theoretical framework are in fact gendered--Chapter 5 discusses this in more depth). When "finding" a gendered process that was not directly or indirectly "validated" by a team member (I seldom confronted them with such a task), I looked for recurring patterns that would allow me to identify gender across individual experiences as well as across teams. When a gendering process I had not expected, or asked about, based on my theoretical framework emerged, I paid careful attention not only to the narrative but also to the sentiments of the respondent who brought it up. For example, through only a handful of experiences, I found that some team members used emotions as tools of dominance and subordination. However, the fact that the respondents' experiences made them visibly distressed caused me to pay more critical attention to the dynamics of emotions. Thus, the weight given by the respondent to his or her own account directed me to explore the specific gendering processes. By the same token, when respondents referred to gendered experiences I had not asked about, I concluded that they were significant.[21]

2.3.1. A few words on "positionality" and meaning creation

The creation of meaning is an interactive process in which both the research and the researched have a constitutive role. It is critical to qualitative research that the researcher acknowledges his or

[21] For example, Robert Emerson (1983: 101) cites Howard Becker's criteria for assessing the credibility of field data in arguing that "data are more credible when they come to the observer as a 'volunteered statement' rather than in response to a question put by the observer."

her role in the inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 12) point out that:

> [t]here are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed. Subjects, or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions: all they can offer are accounts, or stories, about what they did and why.

It is possible--in fact, most likely--that my predisposition toward gender leaves other competing explanations less visible in my analysis (as the discussion on race-ethnicity shows). Dale Jaffe and Eleanor Miller (1994: 55) argue that "qualitative methodologists are reminded that the assumptions of their method mean that they not only discover meaning when they enter the worlds of others, but also bestow it."[22] I therefore acknowledge that the meanings I have given to the team members' experiences also reflect my own world views that are shaped by my own membership in social groups based on (but not limited to), for example, gender, race-ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and age. As a white, middle-class, heterosexual, Finnish (and non-American) woman in my mid-thirties, I believe my interpretations of gendered processes in teams are filtered through all these positions (Jaffe and Miller, 1994: 53).

In addition to personal "positionality," meaning creation is influenced by social structures that "have a permanence and reality that shape the creation of cultural and personal meanings (Jaffe and Miller, 1994: 54). Therefore, gendered processes in teams cannot be fully understood without the notion of structural embeddedness. This study is embedded in the theory that because the case-study teams operate in for-profit business organizations and follow the capitalist logic of profit-making, that also shapes their gender relations. My purpose, throughout the analysis, will be to make links between the micro-level processes of gender in teamwork and the macro-level socio-economic structures in order to establish "structurally embedded" findings (Jaffe and Miller, 1994: 62).

2.3.2. Developing a theory of gendered organization

In essence, the "qualitative narrative" (Cresswell, 1994: 159) I offer not only reports the findings of this study, but also discusses their implications for a theory of gendered organization. My objective is to critically assess Joan Acker's framework of the gendered organization and to discuss claims such as that the gendered organization concept is abstract and ambiguous (Britton, 1998). In the conclusion, I also consider the usefulness of the framework, its strengths and shortcomings, and offer ways in which it can be developed to better respond to and incorporate the localized realities of teams.

I particularly discuss the need to give more weight to various processes of gender resistance in examining gendered processes in organizations. Focusing on resistance will help isolate and bring forth the individual voices of team members against the more structurally embedded, gendered processes. For that purpose, I include voices of resistance throughout the analysis chapters, and also hope that identifying resistance helps substantiate the existence of gendered processes.

---

[22] As Clifford Geertz (1983: 42) puts it, "what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to."

2.4. Verification and Limitations

Although this study provides an in-depth analysis of gendered processes in self-managing teams, it also has many limitations. In this section, I briefly outline some limitations (as not all of them can be known) and discuss the validity and reliability--or "trustworthiness" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994)--of the inquiry.

Because this study involved teams in different types of organizations, with different tasks, membership composition, structure, and most importantly, distinct ways of defining and implementing self-management, it is clear that my ability to generalize the findings to other self-managing teams is limited. While generalization is not the objective of this study, I still believe it is possible to make some inferences about gender in teams. For example, I found that a gender division of labor existed in all teams. Furthermore, I also found that although some teams were supposed to share tasks, men in at least three teams exhibited negative attitudes toward doing 'feminine' clerical tasks. This finding suggests that gendered processes existed in all case-study teams, although the ways in which gendering was manifested in each of them varied.

I used multiple sources of evidence and looked for multiple observable indicators of gendering processes in order to enhance the internal validity of the study. Often the fact that most team members referred to the same event, situation, or dynamic led me to trust that such an event took place. The differences and similarities of the respondents' interpretations of the event then provided information about a gendering process. If, for example, many women spoke about a potentially gendered situation differently than men, I noted the differences as evidence of gender shaping their interpretation (but I did not necessarily require sex-differentiated narratives to view something as gendered).

As for external validity--that is, the representativeness of findings--I believe that the across-team similarities in many gendered processes help establish that the processes I found could possibly also take place in other similar teams. I must note, however, that self-managing teams, including the four I studied, are quite different, have their own cultures and personalities, all of which limit the ability to generalize the findings. Throughout the analysis process, I reflect upon other empirical studies in order to show that similar gendered processes have been found by other researchers, if not in teams (since there are very few studies of them), at least in other organizations.

Perhaps the gravest limitation to fully understanding the meanings that team members gave to their work processes was my relatively short stay in each organization. My involvement in each organization lasted from 4 to 6 work days. Also, the visits varied in terms of the kind of data that were available. For example, I was able to observe one team in a two-day long, intense team meeting, while other teams met only briefly or not at all. However, in all teams, I was able to interview all permanent, full-fledged members.

The reliability of a study can be improved by a detailed description of how the data were acquired (Kirk and Miller, 1986: 41). I have addressed this issue by documenting, step-by-step, how I gained entrance to the organizations, analyzed the data, and interpreted my findings. Furthermore, I discuss my own positionality and its possible effect on my interpretation of the gendering processes. Despite these limitations, this study provides an opportunity to develop a more in-depth understanding of gendered processes and offers new ways to view how gender shapes teamwork.

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the various stages of this study, from site selection to research design, data collection, and analysis. I also discuss the limitations of my findings. As I proceed with the remaining chapters, I draw from the theoretical framework and concepts introduced in Chapter 1 to interpret team members' experiences. The findings are organized and presented thematically, following Acker's gendered processes of gender divisions (Ch. 4) and gendered interaction (Ch. 5). Throughout these chapters, I will return to discuss methodological issues in order to form a better understanding of how I found specific gendered processes.