

## CHAPTER 1

### GENDER, ORGANIZATIONS, AND SELF-MANAGING TEAMS: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

#### 1.1. Introduction

This study examines how gender as a socio-cultural construction features in the currently occurring change from a bureaucratic work organization toward more interactive and team-based structures (Lawler, 1990; Heckscher, 1994). The study focuses specifically on self-managing work teams or self-directed work teams, defined as “groups of interdependent individuals that can self-regulate their behavior on relatively whole tasks” (Cohen and Ledford, 1994: 13). In a multiple case study, using qualitative methods, I examined four currently functioning, mixed-sex self-directed teams in three service sector organizations, in order to explore how and in what ways gender was present in teamwork and shaped their daily work processes, that is, the ways in which self-managing teams were “gendered” (Acker, 1990).

Self-managing teams present perhaps the most visible modification to the traditional bureaucratic work organization. Through implementing self-directed teams, organizations are challenging the hierarchical and functional divisions of the bureaucratic workplace, decentralizing decision-making, and creating and maintaining work units that involve a diverse group of employees (Heckscher and Donnellon, 1994; Sessa and Jackson, 1995). Employees, teamed by management to work together and direct themselves, face, in addition to their actual job assignment, the task of deciding about different aspects of their work and acting upon their decisions. This additional, administrative aspect of their work involves various tasks, such as consensus-building, execution of mutually-agreed decisions and, in some cases, evaluation of their own performance, all of which are part of a “team process” that is an integral part of a self-managing team’s job. My intention was to explore the implications of gender in team processes.

The examination of self-directed teams as sites of gendered processes can be situated in the scholarship of “gendered organizations”<sup>1</sup> (Acker, 1990, 1992a; Witz and Savage, 1992; Hearn and Parkin, 1992) that explores, for instance, the gendered nature of organizational structure (Ferguson, 1984; Acker 1990, 1992a), organizational division of labor (Kanter, 1977; Pierce, 1995), organizational culture (J. Martin, 1990; Mills, 1992) and symbolism (Gherardi, 1995), as well as the construction of sexuality in organizations (Burrell, 1984; Hearn and Parkin, 1995; Hearn et al.,

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<sup>1</sup> I refer here to the literature of gendered organizations in its broadest sense. It includes various approaches that have problematized organizations’ traditional masculine biases and that have emerged from various feminist critiques of work and organizations. Another somewhat narrower definition distinguishes the ‘gendered organization’ approach from the ‘gender-in-organization model’. The former sees organizations as gendered in and of themselves and gender as embedded in the structure and logic of organizations, and the latter view posits that organizations are gender-neutral even though they generate different experiences for men and women (Hall, 1993b). The research review here will draw from both of these approaches, while my study falls into the theoretical tradition of ‘gendered organization’.

1989). Although self-management and self-managing teams have acquired a great deal of attention in the management literature (Beyerlein and Johnson, 1994; Cohen and Ledford, 1994; Yeatts 1997) and laboratory studies have found that sex differences influence groups at work (e.g., Aries, 1976; Ridgeway and Diekema, 1989; Wood and Rhodes, 1992), the extant research neither enhances our understanding of self-directed teams as *gendered entities* nor explores how gender is present in the work processes of *real-life* teams. Most studies of work teams treat organizations as gender-neutral and overlook the ways in which gender is embedded in the structure and logic of organizing. Moreover, while simulations of mixed-sex teams in laboratory conditions may yield important information, these experiments fail to provide contextual data that are needed to understand the interplay between the organization and the individual. If we want, on the one hand, to uncover how gender shapes the processes by which women and men direct themselves as a team and, on the other hand, to learn about the ways in which gender is present in the organizational responses to self-direction, we must study real-life teams in action.

The study of gendered processes in self-managing teams also can be understood as part of a broader research tradition that examines the ways in which institutions and organizations produce and reproduce social structures, such as gender, race-ethnicity, class, age, sexual-orientation, and physical ability (Acker, 1992b). Processes of self-managed teams are constituted and shaped not only by gender but also by race-ethnicity, age, class, and other social-structural positions that team members bring with them to work (Sessa and Jackson, 1995). As Acker (1992b: 566) points out, race-ethnicity, class, and gender relations “come together in cross-cutting ways for particular individuals and at particular historical moments.” Therefore, team members’ experiences are shaped by multiple social positions as they negotiate the meanings of gender and race-ethnicity in their daily activities (Nkomo, 1992; Calás, 1992). In many occasions throughout the study, my theoretical focus on gender revealed important information about race-ethnicity, class, and age. The upcoming chapters will show how gender can produce and reproduce very different experiences as it intertwines with race, class, and age.

## 1.2. Research Questions

This study began with a primary research question: *How and in what ways is gender present in the work processes of self-managing teams, including work assignments and activities of self-management?*

In order to get a deeper understanding of the problem, I formulated two additional (secondary) questions that dealt with the specific context of my study:

- (1) *How do men and women who work together in self-directed teams perceive and report gender to shape work tasks and the process of self-direction?*
- (2) *How does gender facilitate or impede the attainment of team objectives?*

The primary question reflects the exploratory nature of this study and aims at discovering how gender is present in team processes. By “team processes,” I refer to the interaction of team members as they engage in what they understand to be self-direction or self-management. The secondary questions inquired how individual team members perceived the team process and invited stories and comments about specific incidents or situations in which gender had played a role in shaping their work and interaction. I also explored, through interviews, how gender may

impact the teams members' ability to achieve their goals. Team members' reports dealt with both individual and team objectives, depending on how clearly team goals were stated. For example, if team goals were not clearly defined, or if they were articulated as monetary (with a specific dollar amount) rather than in the form of a task or a nonmonetary outcome (customer satisfaction), respondents tended to speak about their individual goals. I will explore this recurring observation in more detail later.

The research questions were informed by the theory of gendered organizations, which sees gender as mediating work processes. However, I view this process as bi- or multidirectional, which means that while gender shapes teamwork, teams also shape the team's gender relations and mediate the ways in which team members construct the meaning of working in a mixed-gender team. In fact, hearing the experiences of team members across different teams, it became clear that what I called "gendered processes" included both gender influencing team processes and team processes shaping gender relations in a team. I will illustrate this interconnection with specific examples throughout the study.

### **1.3. Gender and Organizations**

Sociological research has found that organizations are gendered in many ways (Kanter, 1977; Cockburn, 1991; Acker, 1990; Hall, 1993a, 1993b; Pierce, 1995; Halford, Savage and Witz, 1997). Calling organizations 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. Gender is not an addition to ongoing processes, conceived as gender neutral. Rather, it is an integral part of those processes, which cannot be properly understood without an analysis of gender (Acker, 1990: 146).

In order to better understand this theoretical position, I will briefly describe what I mean by "gender" and explain why we can, for analytical purposes, propose that self-managed teams might be gendered.

A feminist-sociological view maintains that the concept of "gender" refers to the socially and culturally constructed dimensions of one's biological sex.<sup>2</sup> Gender functions as a social category, similar to race-ethnicity and class, that "establishes, in large measure, our life chances and directs our social relations with others" (Andersen, 1993: 31). According to this definition, gender is a social structure which places women and men in different, and unequal, positions in society based on expectations, division of labor, and access to power and resources, thereby shaping the life experiences of men and women (Andersen, 1993: 33).

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<sup>2</sup> Some scholars, however, take this definition further. For example, West and Fenstermaker (1993) argue that gender is not an individual attribute but something we accomplish through social interaction. This shifts our focus from individual characteristics to the social interaction through which we accomplish gender.

### 1.3.1. Gender as a Social Institution

The extent to which gender is present and shapes human lives is further explicated by Lorber (1994) who defines gender as a social institution. Lorber (1994: 1) sees gender as

an institution that establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders the social processes of everyday life, is built into the major social organizations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family, and politics, and also is an entity in and of itself.

In other words, gender not only refers to the qualitative distinctions and divisions between men and women (for example, their gender roles and gendered identities), but also to the quantitative power difference that signifies the social relationship between men and women. Scott (1986: 1067-69) describes how gender always entails an inherent power relation:

Gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power, ... [and] a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated.

Historically, gender divisions have guided the development of social institutions in all Western societies, including the U.S. (Acker, 1992b).<sup>3</sup> The gendered nature of institutions is based on the maintenance and separation of production and reproduction, which occurs through men performing material production of goods and women doing the daily reproduction of human beings. This fundamental sex-based division of labor ensures that men dominate tasks that involve value-adding and thus, in a capitalist society, are associated with more power than women's reproductive and unpaid work (e.g., child bearing and rearing, cooking, cleaning, and other daily activities) (Acker, 1992b). Acker (1990, 1992a) argues further that, historically, the division of production and reproduction has been the building principle of organizations, including work organizations.<sup>4</sup> Organizations, like institutions, were built to accommodate only production

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3 Judith Lorber (1994) sees "gender as an institution" while Joan Acker (1990) talks about gender as a social structure (or a "substructure" in organizations). These two conceptualizations are not necessarily different or mutually exclusive. To me it appears that Lorber and Acker talk about the same empirical phenomena in different terms. Lorber (1994: 5) describes gender "as a process of social construction, a system of social stratification, and an institution that structures every aspect of our lives because of its embeddedness in the family, the workplace, and the state, as well as in sexuality, language, and culture." Acker's (1990) conceptualization of gender as an organizing principle is more contextually specific, describing complex (hierarchical) organizations. Nevertheless, both Lorber and Acker perceive gender to shape social micro and macro structures and to be reproduced through individuals acting out gender norms in interactive, face-to-face situations (Lorber, 1994: 6; Acker, 1990: 146-147).

In the following discussion of gender and organizations, I will follow Acker's theoretical framework to describe the ways in which gender is produced and reproduced by and in work organizations.

4 Other interpretations for the 'source' of bureaucratic structure also exist. Dana Britton (1998), for example, argues for a more psychoanalytic explanation of bureaucratic structure instead of situating its source in the social gender division of labor. Referring to Benjamin (1988), she argues that the dichotomy of private vs. public is a product of "characteristically masculine patterns of intrapsychic development" that is based on

(the culturally masculine activity) and to exclude reproductive (feminine) activities.

[Organizations] would have quite different forms if reproduction were not cordoned off in a separate sphere. They would have to organize within their boundaries childbirth, sexual activities, sleeping, eating, and other daily maintenance activities (Acker, 1992b: 567).

Sociologists attempting to reveal the gendered nature of social institutions have argued that gender divisions pattern labor markets (Coverman, 1988), occupations (Reskin and Hartmann, 1986), organizations (Acker, 1990; Reskin, 1993), job ladders and opportunity structures (Kanter, 1977; Baron and Bielby, 1985; Baron, Davis-Blake, and Bielby, 1986), unions (Milkman, 1982), groups (Baron and Bielby, 1986) as well as individual jobs (Acker, 1989; Leidner, 1991; Hall, 1993a; Pierce, 1996). For example, in most work places, men occupy the organizational apex, while women, disproportionate to their labor force participation rates, hold lower-paid and less-influential jobs at the bottom (Kanter 1977; Acker, 1990; Pierce, 1995).

### 1.3.2. Masculinities and Femininities: Gender as an Identity

Another attempt to deal with gender is brought forward by research on masculinities and organizations (Collinson and Hearn, 1994; Cheng, 1996a; Connell, 1987 and 1995; Hearn, 1993). These studies examine how gender and specifically, the masculine identity, is constructed in organizations and woven into organizational logic, structures, and processes (Cheng, 1996b). The recognition that organizations produce and reproduce multiple masculine identities also extends the definition of gender. Much of organizational research is guilty of narrowly understanding “gender” to mean women as a biological category and implicitly assuming that only women have gender (Calás and Smircich, 1992b; Alvesson and Billing, 1997).

The relationship between masculinity (or masculinities) and organizations is an important addition for making sense of the gendered nature of organizations; it also broadens the focus of gender research from women and men (as bodies) to the cultural production of masculinities and femininities in organization (Alvesson and Billing, 1997). These studies are concerned, for example, about how organizations produce and reproduce multiple male identities, and what follows when organizations impose on men (and women who want to succeed in organizations) a “hegemonic masculine identity” that emphasizes, for example, authoritarianism, paternalism, entrepreneurialism, careerism and, informalism (Collinson and Hearn, 1994). Although the idea of masculinities and femininities as culturally constructed multiple identities available for individuals in organizations regardless of their sex (Alvesson and Billing, 1997) does broaden the definition of gender from strictly female and male bodies, the reality of organizations remains so that masculinities are valued higher than femininities and that men as a group have an immediate

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the simultaneous need for and denial of the dependence on others. This denial is accomplished (and expressed) by “artificially compartmentalizing the social world into public and private spheres, and, through subjugating women, banishing nurturing and dependence to the realm of the family” (Britton, 1998). Hence, the subsequent development of an “autonomous bureaucratic actor presumed by the Weberian ideal type.”

access to “mobilize”<sup>5</sup> these more valuable masculine identities in different situations to their benefit. In order for women to succeed in a culturally masculine organization, they often have to develop a masculine identity in order to appear what Acker (1990: 139) calls acting “as a social man.”

### 1.3.3. Gender as a Relation

In this study I emphasize the meaning of gender as a socially constructed power *relation* and think it critical for teasing out the presence of gender in teamwork. The focus on women and men as somewhat isolated categories --or at least isolating them theoretically by focusing on either one or the other--would run a risk of de-emphasizing the *relationship* between men and women and pays less attention to the relational meaning of gender as a constructive element and a signifier of power relations in our society (Scott, 1986).

Understanding gender as a relation also provides a rationale for the use of mixed-sex teams in this study. One can argue that gendered processes occur and shape work even in single-gender contexts (whether organizations or teams). However, I am specifically interested in the ways in which a mixed-sex unit constructs and displays its gender relations in concrete situations. The presence of both men and women may act as a catalyst to negotiating gender norms and expectations. Therefore, teams with both men and women provide sites where they “do gender” by engaging in the “interactional work involved in being a gendered person in society” (West and Zimmerman, 1987). If we understand gender as a “contextually situated process” (Hall, 1993b: 454) and as an interactional activity of displaying socially-scripted, gender-appropriate behavior (West and Zimmerman, 1987), then we can assume that mixed-sex self-managing teams provide a context for various ways of doing (relational) gender. Exploring mixed-sex teams, therefore, can help us tap into the concrete ways in which “gender is present in the processes, practices, images and ideologies, and distribution of power” of work teams (Acker, 1992b: 567).

### 1.3.4. Gender as an Organizational Process

In addition to the manifest “gender displays,” many gendering processes are hidden or transparent in that they appear perfectly neutral to the members of an organization. According to Joan Acker (1992a: 251),

[G]endered processes and practices may be open and overt, as when managers choose only men or only women for certain positions or when sexual jokes denigrating women are part of the work culture. On the other hand, gender may be deeply hidden in organizational processes and decisions that appear to have nothing to do with gender.

The “gendering of organizations” occurs through gendering processes that produce and reproduce a “gender sub-structure” of an organization. These processes include but are not limited to:

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<sup>5</sup> The idea of men’s ability to “mobilize” masculine identities was introduced by Patricia Y. Martin in personal communication, August 1998.

- (1) The production of *gendered divisions*, such as “patterning of jobs, wages, hierarchies, power, and subordination.”
- (2) The creation of *symbols*, images, and metaphors that justify (or oppose) organizational gender divisions.
- (3) The *interactions* between men and women, among men, and among women that are “part of the concrete work of organization” and that “create alliances and exclusions.”
- (4) “The internal *mental work of individuals* as they consciously construct their understandings of the organization’s gendered structure of work and opportunity and the demands for gender-appropriate behaviors and attitudes,” and based on their understanding, create and negotiate their “correct gendered persona” in order to survive in the organization (Acker, 1992a: 252-254).

The main idea behind naming these processes is that they identify empirically-derived, specific organizational practices and locations that produce and reproduce gendered social relations. While Acker’s (1990, 1992a) list of gendering processes is not exhaustive, it is a one-of-a-kind attempt to sort out and make sense of gendered organizational practices and outcomes.<sup>6</sup> It also helps us direct attention to key gendering processes, which can lead to the discovery of other, more transparent gendering processes and unrevealed power asymmetries. In essence, “we must learn to recognize the prestructuring of management, workplaces and organization in gender assumptions, rules and values, without forgetting that gender is a pervasive symbol of the power relation” (Gherardi, 1995: 17). The following discussion will further explore how gender is built into and therefore shapes interaction and work in a specific type of work group, that is, the self-managing team.

#### **1.4. The Self-Managing Team: Concept and Practice**

“Self-managing” or “self-directed team”<sup>7</sup> describes a unit of employees who manage different aspects of their work. While self-management is a popular idea among managers and business consultants, its practical applications vary a great deal across organizations. As with many managerial ‘innovations’, the way self-managed teams are implemented seldom corresponds to an ideal-typical model of self-management. Companies are known to design teams to meet their individual needs and use whichever aspects of teams they see suitable, which results in a broad

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<sup>6</sup> Acker’s idea that organizations are fundamentally gendered has been criticized for appearing deterministic and at risk of diverting our attention from our ability to transform organizations through individual and social action (Britton, 1996). I do not promote the idea that once organizations are deemed gendered, they cannot be changed (neither does Acker, see Acker, 1995). I believe Acker’s framework is useful in making sense of the ways in which gender divisions reproduce organizational inequality between women and men (and organizations reproduce gender inequality). After all, in order to build more egalitarian organizations, we must first identify those structures and processes that maintain inegalitarian gender relations.

<sup>7</sup> Rollin Glaser (1992: xi) points out that there are dozens of ways in which self-managing teams have been labeled: “self-regulating, autonomous, semi-autonomous, self-directing, and so on.” In this study, I will refer to these teams by the two most popular labels “self-managing” and “self-directed.” Despite the fact that these terms may have somewhat different meanings, I use them interchangeably.

range of practices that are called self-managing (Walton and Hackman, 1986).<sup>8</sup> Management consultants Wellins, Byham, and Wilson (1991: 4) offer a list of defining characteristics of self-directed teams, which can be used as an ideal type against which to compare the multitude of practical variations:

- (1) They are empowered to share various management and leadership functions.
- (2) They plan, control, and improve their own work processes.
- (3) They set their own goals and inspect their own work.
- (4) They often create their own schedules and review their performance as a group.
- (5) They may prepare their own budgets and coordinate their work with other departments.
- (6) They usually order materials, keep inventories, and deal with suppliers.
- (7) They frequently are responsible for acquiring any new training they might need.
- (8) They may hire their own replacements or assume responsibility for disciplining their own members.
- (9) They--not others outside the team--take responsibility for the quality of their products or services.

Others have described self-managed teams as groups that engage in face-to-face interaction, consist of employees with a variety of skills and interrelated tasks, and allow employees to decide about task assignments, work pace and flow, as well as specific work methods, albeit under some type of supervision (Cohen and Ledford, 1994: 14; Osterman, 1994: 187). According to Richard Hackman's (1986: 93-97) basic behaviors of self-management, self-managed teams typically take responsibility for the outcomes of their work, monitor and manage their own performance, take corrective action to improve their performance, actively seek organizational help when they perform poorly, and offer help to other people or teams for improving overall organizational performance.

The existence of diverse descriptions implies that we should treat definitions of self-managing teams as ideal-typical. After all, in practice, teams may call themselves--or be called by management--self-managing even though they only partly involve self-directive activities. Because the transformation toward team-based work systems is an on-going process, despite their name, teams also vary in the degree of self-management. For example, in the service sector, where team-orientation is a somewhat younger phenomenon than in manufacturing industries, a team may be named self-managing while it is still "facilitated" by a team leader or "coached" by a manager. Hence, the notion of self-management is an ideal type that organizations and teams may, officially or unofficially, strive for but may not yet fully achieve. Finally, even "fully" self-managed teams are supervised to some degree just because they exist in an organization and most likely in a hierarchical power structure.

Despite their autonomy, self-managing teams do not have the authority to design themselves,

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<sup>8</sup> The extent to which teams are self-managed varies across organizations. For example, a team may be called self-managed or self-directed if it is designated to become self-managing in the future, even if it has not yet reached full control of its operations. There are also differences in how companies define self-management. What one company calls a fully self-directed team may in another be considered only partially self-directed. Also, managers (and employees) may identify a team as self-directed or self-managing even though the team does not have an official status as one.

define their own context, or set larger organizational goals (Polley and Van Dyne, 1994: 3). Comparing self-managing teams to other well-known participatory programs such as Total Quality Management, 'participatory decision making', and 'empowerment', Polley and Van Dyne (1994: 4) claim that empowerment, participation, and employee involvement are "important techniques that can contribute to the success of SMWTs [self-managing work teams]" but they are not "necessary or sufficient conditions for SMWTs." As a working definition, and to accommodate the variety of practical applications of self-management, I will call "self-managing" or "self-directed" those teams that "self-regulate their behavior on relatively whole tasks" (Cohen and Ledford, 1994: 13).

The team approaches that U.S. companies use today reflect the evolution of small group practices invented both in the United States and abroad during the latter part of the twentieth century (Cole, 1989; Tubbs, 1994). In the U.S., teams were initially developed to provide an alternative to the mass-production model of work and add a human dimension to work in the industrial bureaucracy (Appelbaum and Batt, 1994); in the past two decades, they have evolved into "*the* major new American industrial weapon to fend off international competitive threats" (Shipper and Manz, 1994: 48). On the one hand, team-based management and employee involvement are integral parts of companies' strategies for offsetting high labor costs and more efficiently utilizing the skills of employees (Lawler, 1989; Klein, 1993). On the other hand, and somewhat conflictingly, Osterman (1994) observed that the establishments (that is, individual organizations or "business addresses") that most often adopted flexible work practices (such as self-directed teams) also embraced managerial values that emphasized employee welfare.

Whatever the motivation, self-managing teams are becoming increasingly common both in the manufacturing and service sectors. A 1992 survey of Fortune 1000 companies revealed that 47% of them used self-managing teams and 60% were planning to increase their use in the next two years (Lawler, Mohrman, and Ledford, 1992). These statistics were supported by another, more recent survey that concluded that about 35% of private sector establishments use flexible work practices of which self-directed teams are the most common (Osterman, 1994). While empirical studies on why companies employ flexible practices, such as self-managing teams, are inconclusive, Osterman (1994: 186) identifies a set of factors that facilitate their adoption: "a market with international competition; a high skill technology; work-oriented values; following a high-road strategy (emphasizing service, quality, and variety of products rather than low cost); and being a part of a larger organization."

Although the use of self-managing teams in manufacturing has been studied and documented for quite a while now (see, for example, studies of the U.S. auto industry in Babson, 1995; Florida and Kenney, 1991; Bernstein, 1992), Osterman's (1994: 177) data indicate that there is greater prevalence of teams in the service sector. Among a set of flexible workplace practices which include self-directed teams, job rotation, TQM, and QC, "self-directed teams appear less widespread in manufacturing than elsewhere in the economy, but the other practices are more common in manufacturing (Osterman, 1994: 177). U.S. companies associated with successful self-managing teams include, in manufacturing, Corning, Cummings Engine, Procter and Gamble, Hewlett-Packard, Xerox, General Motors, Ford, Digital Equipment, Honeywell, General Electric, and Boeing (Osterman, 1994; Walton and Hackman, 1986; Shipper and Manz, 1992) and in services, for example, Hanover Insurance (Osterman, 1994).

#### 1.4.1. Development of Teams in the U.S.

Cross-national studies of small groups reveal that work teams have been developed and used around the world, including the U.S., Japan, Sweden, Germany, and Italy (Cole, 1989; Appelbaum and Batt, 1994). Although teams are used in most industrialized countries as part of policies and practices for workplace democracy (e.g., Lammers and Széll, 1989), there are some profound differences in the meaning and goals of team work across national cultures. For example, the Japanese “quality control circles” aim at increasing responsibility and the sharing of ideas and suggestions within traditional hierarchical organizational structures, but do not interfere with top authority (Marsh, 1992). On the other hand, the “self-steering work groups” used in Scandinavia provide employees with greater authority and independence (Cole, 1989: 24-33). Most American teams fall somewhere between these types. Appelbaum and Batt (1994) describe the current American team practices in terms of two models that are distinctly American because they are grounded in the American human resource model of the 1940s and 1950s,<sup>9</sup> although they differ in their use of human resource practices. The first system is called the “American version of lean production” and it is illustrated by the current top-down, management-driven quality movement. The second system, “American team production,” “combines the principles of Swedish sociotechnical systems and self-directed work with those of quality engineering” (Appelbaum and Batt, 1994: 125).<sup>10</sup> The distinctions are useful for understanding how teams are used in each system. The lean production model, based on Japanese management style, advocates quality training and employee involvement in the whole organization, but maintains centralized, top-down decision-making (Marsh, 1992). In contrast, the team production model involves decentralization of decision-making. The team production approach originates from the Tavistock Institute in Britain where social scientists developed work systems that accommodated both technical and social components of work (see e.g., Trist and Bamforth, 1951; Tubbs, 1994). It also draws from the Human Relations model that emphasizes quality-of-worklife and job satisfaction (Appelbaum and Batt, 1994: 135; Cole, 1989: 25). Theoretically, the motive for using teams in the lean production model is to achieve greater efficiency, and although the team production model does not overlook efficiency concerns, its emphasis is on decentralizing organizational decision-making. In practice, however, these systems frequently overlap and therefore, self-directed teams are used in both types of organization.

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<sup>9</sup> This early attempt to establish employee involvement originated from the Hawthorne studies’ findings concerning the influence of informal groups at work. The human relations approach proposed the use of groups to counter the impersonality of industrial bureaucracy and called for leaders to be more democratic in order to improve employee effectiveness and productivity (e.g., Tubbs, 1994; see also Lawler, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> Others describe the nature of American employee involvement programs (EIPs) in terms of two distinct practices (Smith, 1996; Fantasia, Clawson, and Graham, 1988). The first involves employees’ participation in negotiating company-level policies in joint labor/management committees and often offers ownership plans to employees. This type of participatory scheme is most likely to be used in unionized manufacturing industries. The second consists of EIPs that aim at eliciting workers’ input for problem-solving “at the point of production” and coordinating and managing work systems. This aims at permanently integrating worker participation into the labor process through job enrichment, job rotation, and self-managing teams (Smith, 1996: 168).

### 1.4.2. Efficiency of Teams

For corporations, self-managing teams bring about many advantages, perhaps the most significant of which is the ability to save labor costs by having teams perform the job previously held by low-level managers (Barker, 1993). Proponents of self-management claim that self-managed teams are more effective than traditionally managed workers (Ranney, 1992; Cohen and Ledford, 1994; Macy, forthcoming). In addition to boosting American competitiveness in the global market place, self-managing teams enable managers to more efficiently use workers' skills and brainpower, ensure faster decisions by reducing bureaucracy, and help workers fight boredom on the job (Walton and Hackman, 1986; Klein, 1993; Lawler, 1989). By promoting employees' (semi-)autonomous decision-making, management can at the same time increase workers' identification with the work process, strengthen workers' commitment to the organization and ensure a faster response to changing market conditions (Lawler, 1990; Deming, 1993; Juran and Gryna, 1993). Productivity gains notwithstanding, studies show that teams can ameliorate relations between employees and managers and among employees as they gain greater independence from their managers (Appelbaum and Batt, 1994). Although it is the managers who designate which teams will become autonomous, and manage the process of becoming one, when teams reach the state of self-direction (and even while they work towards that state), they are subjected to less managerial control than other teams in the organization.

### 1.4.3. Employees in Teams

A great deal of the studies and debates about self-managing teams focus on teams' effectiveness in achieving organizational goals (Hackman, 1990; Bettenhausen, 1991; Cohen and Ledford, 1993), which--with some notable exceptions (e.g., Barker, 1993; Smith, 1996)--leaves the employees' side of team involvement virtually unstudied. The management discourse that guarantees benefits to team employees needs to be empirically assessed in relation to the experiences of self-managed team workers.

Research findings on employees' experiences of self-management do not fully live up to the promises of management advocates. One study of self-managing teams found that in the absence of management control, team members themselves developed and enforced a system of "concertive control," thereby strengthening the organization's control over its employees (Barker, 1993). By giving workers autonomy from managerial control, the firm succeeded in eliciting more powerful control of workers by setting them up to watch each other (Barker, 1993: 408).<sup>11</sup> Even though self-management may extend organizational control over workers, Smith's (1996) study of self-managing service teams shows that individual team members report many gains from self-managed teams. Most members in the self-managed, machine-operator teams of a large U.S. copy service subcontractor studied by Smith (1996) reported that they learned valuable communication skills as part of their team training. Without exception, these newly acquired communication skills made team members feel more in control when interacting with clients and enabled them to manage perceptions of themselves better (Smith, 1996: 173). In this case, participation in a self-management scheme did not provide the racial-ethnic minority, low-level

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<sup>11</sup> As one of Barker's (1993: 408) subjects said: "I don't have to sit there and look for the boss to be around. . . [to] talk to my neighbor or do what I want. Now the whole team is around me and the whole team is observing what I am doing."

machine operators technical skills but rather social-relational competence. Because social-relational skills are traditionally associated with the socially more valued white-male, white-collar service jobs, the machine operators saw them as valuable and useful tools for future employment (Smith, 1996: 177-178).

In summary, according to proponents, self-managing teams offer greater opportunities for employees to participate in daily decision-making, give them greater 'ownership' of their work, and encourage them to work harder, thereby enhancing organizational effectiveness and productivity. It seems evident that self-managing teams will constitute an integral part of the 21st century workplace in the production of both goods and services (Walton and Hackman, 1986; Lawler, 1990; Wellis, Byham, and Wilson, 1991; Heckscher, 1994; Katzenbach and Smith, 1993a). Self-managing teams also will provide a context for redefining workplace relations not only between employees and managers but also among employees who differ by virtue of gender and race-ethnicity.

### **1.5. The Gendering of Small Groups and Teams**

The movement toward a team-based organizational structure has rekindled an old research interest in the social relations of teams. Work group studies of the 1950s and 1960s focused on job satisfaction and quality of worklife (McGregor, 1960) after researchers found that satisfactory informal social relations among workers enhanced their productivity (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939). Today, it is the growing diversity of the workforce, namely, the entrance of women and racial-ethnic minorities to traditionally white male work organizations, that is driving researchers to re-examine the social relations of teams (Loden and Rosener, 1991; Chemers, Oskamp, and Costanzo, 1995). Within the framework of demographic change in the labor force, gender is seen as one component of the diversity that characterizes today's work organization--in addition to other components, such as race-ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, physical ability, national culture, religion, and political thought (Ragins, 1995). In some cases, 'diversity' also encompasses different education and skills, work specialization, and organizational tenure or level (Cox and Finley, 1995; Milliken and Martins, 1996). A common denominator among these approaches to diversity is, in different degrees, their concern with organizational efficiency and "managing diversity" (Fernandez, 1991; Loden and Rosener, 1991; Jackson, Stone, and Alvarez, 1992; Cox, 1993). On the one hand--from the managers' point of view--"unmanaged diversity" interferes with efforts to align employees behind organizational goals, induces conflict among members, and produces unfavorable outcomes (Cox and Finley, 1995: 67). On the other hand, diversity can be a positive force in teams because it can provide fertile ground for innovation and creativity as team members bring to the problem solving process different ideas and solutions that might not emerge in a more homogeneous group (Cox, 1993: 27; Sessa and Jackson, 1995). However, a recent review of group studies indicates that diversity tends to generate more concern than celebration among managers because of the fear that, in a crisis situation, heterogeneity may slow down a team's ability to reach consensus (Bettenhausen, 1991: 356; see also Herschel, Crossland, and Noel, 1994: 220).

### 1.5.1. Sex Differences in Group Behavior

In this section, I will briefly summarize some key findings of small group research<sup>12</sup> in the recent past. Since this study will employ neither the social-psychological theories nor the methods used by small group researchers (but instead approaches teams from the point of view of gendered organizations), I use this section primarily to introduce what is known about behavior of men and women in small groups. My study does not test the findings presented here but, instead, I use them to guide data collection and the discovery of gendered processes.

It must be noted that in the past two decades, most small group research has been conducted in laboratory settings (Bartol and D. Martin, 1986: 291) and it has examined issues of cooperation, communication, managerial style, and job satisfaction. The use of a laboratory setting to study gender issues in small groups is criticized, for example, by Patricia Yancey Martin (1992: 221-222) who calls for more investigation of real-life groups in organizations because they

influence the creation and maintenance of gender inequality in organizations. . . They can be studied to find out how a priori gendering is played out in interpersonal exchanges . . . [and] the ways in which in vivo groups *originate* gendering practices and arrangements (original emphasis).

While small group research still emphasizes individual-level social-psychological phenomena, currently it appears to pay more attention to groups in real-life organizations and to the importance of generating contextual data about group behavior (Bettenhausen, 1991; Cohen and Ledford, 1994).

Researchers have typically been interested in explaining why men and women behave differently in small groups. Studies of sex differences in group behavior have evolved from the sex-role approach, labeling men as task-oriented and women as ‘expressive specialists’ (e.g., Parsons and Bales, 1955), to seeing group behavior as an expression of one’s social status, such as sex (Meeker and Weitzel-O’Neill, 1977). The so-called “status generalization-expectation states” approach maintains that in the absence of contrary information about an individual, sex serves as a cue for a person’s societal status and a basis for expectation of behavior and performance (for an overview, see Webster and Foschi, 1988). Because men have a higher social status than women, expectations of their performance are greater. As a result, men in small groups “will receive and take more opportunities to make task contributions, will have more influence and more prestige and will receive more expressions of agreement and approval” than women group members (Meeker and Weitzel-O’Neill, 1977: 95). Researchers using the status generalization-expectation states theory have found, for example, that women exhibit greater group conformity than men (Eagly, Wood, and Fishbaugh, 1981), that men interrupt women more than women interrupt men (Aries, 1976) or that men interrupt women more than they interrupt other men, while women

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<sup>12</sup> With regard to terminology, the concept of “small groups” is used mostly by researchers with social-psychological interests. It refers to a broad range of small groups that include family groups, therapy groups, ad hoc laboratory groups, and task groups. Typically, the word ‘team’ implies a task-oriented group, whether in a laboratory or a real-life organization. One problem of group studies is that they should be more uniform in using the term ‘work group’, which some studies use for a whole class of students or even an entire organization (P. Martin, 1992: 221).

interrupt both men and women equally (Smith-Lovin and Brody, 1989), and that women are more likely than men to try to ease group tension and express emotion, even while performing tasks (Wood and Rhodes, 1992). A survey of studies of mixed-sex, leaderless groups concludes that women are more passive than men toward leadership, perform more expressive than instrumental tasks, and if they do express leadership behavior, find it more difficult to be socially included, especially by men who tend to resist women's leadership (Bartol and D. Martin, 1986: 291-292).

In general, in explaining the group behavior of women and men--and lately, inequality (Wagner, 1988; Ridgeway and Diekema, 1989; P. Martin, 1992)--small group studies have referred either to traditional sex-roles or to differences in the status and performance expectations of women and men. They view, explicitly or implicitly, behavioral gender differences as potential obstacles to cooperation and effectiveness (Herschel, Crossland, and Noel, 1994; Wood and Rhodes, 1992; Bettenhausen, 1991). Most importantly, they posit the source of gender differences in behavior in the individual--either their socially learned, gender-appropriate behavior or their socio-cultural status. Hence they overlook the possibility that organizational structures and processes can also shape behavior in small groups, for example, by obliterating any organizational context in laboratory experiments. A more complete understanding of how organizations are gendered requires us to explore those organizational sources (structures and processes) that produce and reproduce gendered behavior (Acker, 1990).

#### 1.5.2. Gendered Teams: An Application of 'Useful Knowledge'

This study was motivated by both theoretical concerns about the effects of gender in teams and the practical need to generate "useful knowledge" for managers and employees who wish to change the disruptive and discriminating gender systems in organizations (Cheng, 1996b).<sup>13</sup> My theoretical objective was to develop Acker's framework of gendered organizations and to increase our understanding of gendered processes in specific organizational units, such as self-managing teams. An additional catalyst for this study was to find out about the possible advantages and disadvantages to teams and to individual team members that may result from gendered processes. I am especially concerned with how self-directed teams as gendered structures can overcome those aspects of gendered processes that impede teams' efforts to reach their goals and maintain gender bias in teams. Discovering particular ways in which self-managing teams are gendered can reveal some previously unknown aspects of teamwork that create barriers and incentives for the team. Furthermore, learning about how team processes are shaped by gender will help us revise those processes and structures that hinder more effective and egalitarian teamwork and build upon those that help teams achieve their objectives.

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<sup>13</sup> 'Useful knowledge' is defined through its application. It is knowledge that "serves an actor's purpose, such as contributing to decision-making, guiding behaviors, and solving problems" (Mohrman, Cummings, and Lawler, 1983: 617). Cheng (1996a: xvi) calls for the production of 'useful knowledge' that "benefits change agents, practicing managers and employees who are interested in changing the oppressive bipolar gender system of modernistic organizations that is built on rigid sex segregation and other forms of discrimination."

## **1.6. Conclusion**

Having outlined the theoretical framework in this chapter, in Chapter 2, I describe the research methods and design I used to examine gender in self-managing teams. The remainder of the dissertation then introduces the teams and reports the findings. Chapter 3 introduces each team in its organizational context and describes in more detail its composition and status. In Chapter 4, I examine those gendering processes that created and maintained gender divisions in teams and, in addition, explore how teams can also unite members and overcome divisions. Chapter 5 deals with gendering processes in interaction situations, such as constructing gendered meanings of emotion displays and using gendered metaphors to guide team behavior. Finally, in Chapter 6, I summarize the main findings, outline avenues for future research, and reflect upon the possibility of teams to foster organizational gender equality.